

A NEARLY PERFECT STORM:
THE RISE AND FALL OF THE EASTERN TURKISTAN PEOPLE'S
REVOLUTIONARY PARTY

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Submitted to the faculty of the University Graduate School
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree
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REVOLUTIONARY PARTY

In the summer of 1969, China and the Soviet Union teetered at the brink of war. Looking to exploit a perceived vulnerability, Soviets used the language of national liberation to encourage minority peoples along the Sino-Soviet border to collaborate in efforts to destabilize the Chinese frontier. In the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, the so-called “Eastern Turkistan People’s Revolutionary Party” heeded this call.

The relationship between China and the Muslim Turkic peoples of Xinjiang’s Tarim and Zungharian Basins had long been tense. During the first half of the twentieth century, separatist movements in 1933 and 1944 had taken advantage of Chinese instability and disarray to claim independence for “Eastern Turkistan.” While these regimes proved short-lived, the fantasy of an independent Eastern Turkistan persisted beyond liberation in 1949. During the “Three Districts Revolution,” as the second Eastern Turkistan Republic is generally referred in post-liberation literature, an underground Eastern Turkistan People’s Revolutionary Party existed as Xinjiang’s first Turkic Marxist political party. Formally, this organization later folded and merged with the Chinese Communist Party. Its leaders, including future governor Seypidin Ezizi, formed a core of local leadership that guided Xinjiang through the tumultuous early years of the People’s Republic of China.

Subsequent disillusionment with that government, however, led some former members to clandestinely resurrect the old party, with hopes that they could be the

vanguards of a third Eastern Turkistan Republic. The domestic chaos forged during the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution would provide the opportunity that they sought. As mass organizations began amassing weapons in early 1967, so too did the People's Revolutionary Party. With Soviet assistance, the partisans expanded their operations and formulated concrete plans for an insurrection against Chinese rule. If they cooperated, cross-border propaganda broadcasts assured them, the Soviet Army and other sympathetic forces would deliver them an independent Eastern Turkistan. When Soviet and Chinese negotiators defused international tensions through diplomacy, however, an already-mobilized Eastern Turkistan People's Revolutionary Party was left to fend for itself. The party quickly buckled under the weight of an investigation by Chinese security forces.

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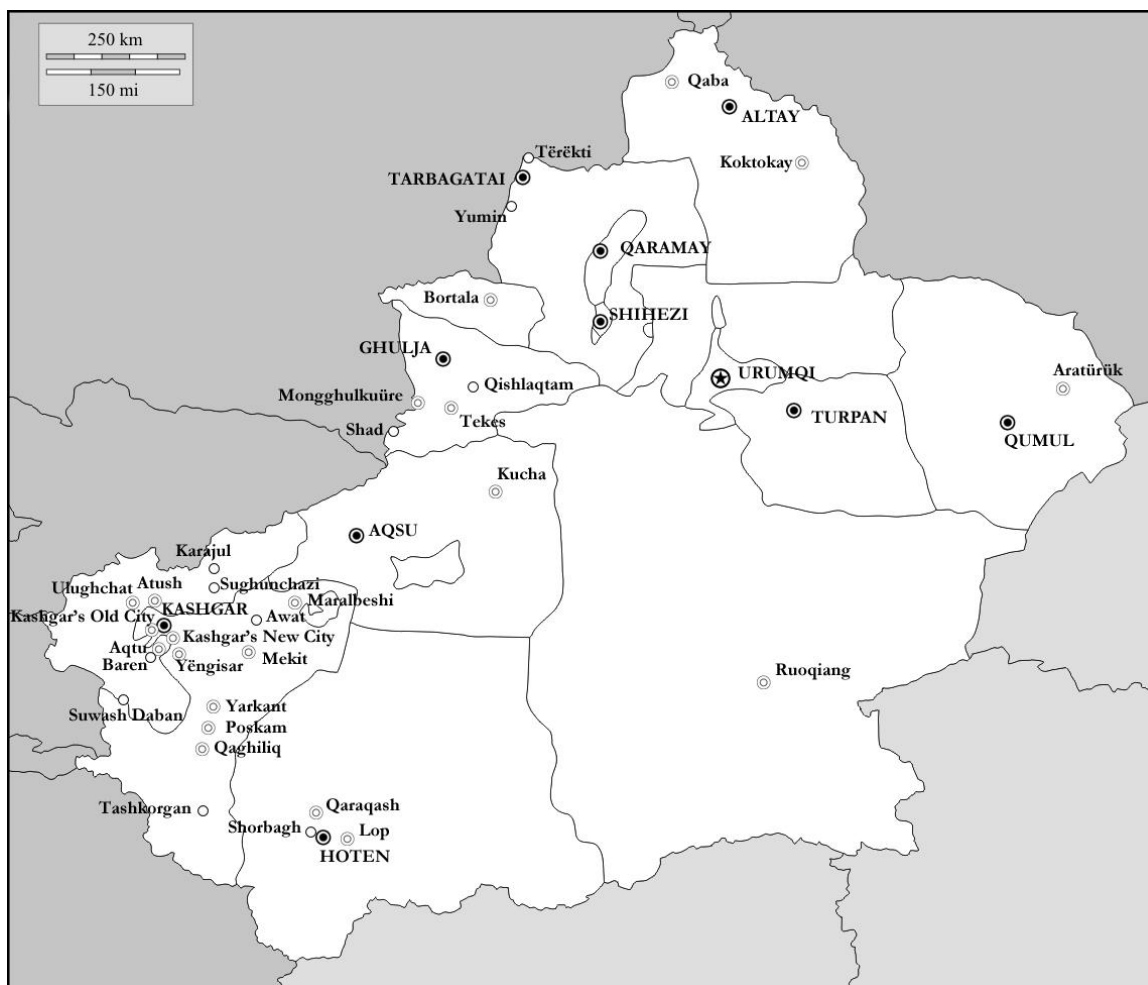
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The Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region
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ONE

The Eastern Turkistan People's Revolutionary Party Takes a Stand

A small band of rebel partisans lay in wait, scattered in a grove of tamarisk trees on a hill overlooking the small western Chinese village of Karajul (*Qarajül*, or *Halajun* 哈拉峻). The mid-afternoon desert sun glared down on them relentlessly from above, shade from the trees' wispy branches providing only minor respite from the late summer's heat. Hungry, thirsty, and short on sleep, the men and women were exhausted. Nonetheless, they were determined, against all odds, to stand their ground, to overtake the village, and to forge a path on which their Soviet liberators could come to rescue their homeland. Yet the larger, better equipped, and more sophisticated People's Liberation Army had them surrounded. From armored vehicles at the base of the hill, loud speakers bellowed out to the guerilla fighters in ear-piercingly loud, yet clear Uyghur, "*Iqrar qilsang kengchilik qilimiz, qarshiliq körsetseng ğghir jazalaymiz...*" – that is, "if you confess, we will be lenient. If you resist, we will punish you severely."¹ They had not foreseen their struggle coming to this. The domestic chaos fomented during China's tumultuous Cultural Revolution had given them ample cover for their activities, allowing their group to organize, to expand, and to build in strength with little risk of detection. This weary assemblage of insurgents, now grossly outnumbered by its enemies, was but a remnant of a dissident organization that had in recent years grown to cover every corner of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region – a land that they knew as "Eastern Turkistan."

¹ Narrative elements of this telling are based on the first-hand accounts of Abdurreshid Haji Kërimi, who was among the fighters present for the battle in Karajul. See Abdurreshid Haji Kërimi, *Qarajüldiki jeng* (The Battle in Karajul) (Istanbul: Teklimakan uyghur neshriyati, 2006), p. 121.

The Eastern Turkistan People's Revolutionary Party (Uyghur: *Sherqiy türkistan xelq inqilabiy partiyisi*, or XIP/Chinese: *Dong tujuesitan renmin geming dang* 东突厥斯坦人民革命党, or *Dongtudang* 东突党) was founded nearly a quarter century prior to this 1969 confrontation. It was a clandestine Soviet-aligned Marxist-Leninist party that operated in Xinjiang during the so-called “Three Districts Revolution” (1944-1949), a period during which Turki separatists operated an independent, Soviet-backed regime based in the northern Xinjiang city of Ghulja (*Yining* 伊宁). Throughout the existence of the People's Revolutionary Party (acronym XIP, pronounced *hip*), its naïve and inexperienced young founders served its goals not only through underground partisan activities, but also through their active participation in both the Ghulja regime and Xinjiang's China-backed provincial government. Before long, at the insistence of Soviet advisors, XIP courted an alliance with the Chinese Communist Party. When the CCP emerged victorious in the Chinese Civil War (1946-1949), the fledgling People's Republic of China absorbed the Eastern Turkistan Republic. At the same time, the membership of the People's Revolutionary Party became members of the Chinese Communist Party. Former XIP leaders such as Seypidin Ezizi (*Saifuding* 赛福鼎) and Muhemmet'imin Iminof (*Yiminnuofu* 伊敏诺夫) emerged as prominent members in Xinjiang's post-liberation leadership class.

Yet this did not mark the end of the People's Revolutionary Party. The Soviet Union had been the arbiter through which XIP formed its alliance with the CCP, and later, it was the force that advanced the merger of the two parties.² While the memoirs of XIP veterans from this era insist emphatically that the party was totally autonomous – that it was

² See Enwer Xanbaba, “Üch wilayet inqilabi dewridiki partiye-teshkatlar” (Parties and Organizations during the Three Districts Era), *Shinjang tarix matëriyallari* (Xinjiang Historical Materials), No. 42 (Urumqi: Shinjang xelq neshriyati, 1999) (1999), pp. 30-31.

initially founded without the knowledge of the Soviet Union, that it operated with minimal influence from the outside, and that the partisan aspirations it espoused were purely those of its membership and not of a foreign actor – it is nonetheless indisputable that, once involved, the Soviet Union played a crucial role in charting its fate. Sources differ regarding whether, after 1949, XIP ever truly ceased to exist. It is completely possible that it continued functioning within the People’s Republic of China as it had within the Eastern Turkistan Republic, as a clandestine party whose leaders adopted dual roles both internally and within the Chinese Communist administration. It is further possible that XIP’s later reemergence was a fully spontaneous response to its membership’s disenchantment with the Chinese regime – with its failed promises, poorly conceived policies, and increasingly aggressive posturing against both former XIP members and the ideals that they pursued. Nonetheless, as the Soviet Union played such a crucial role in XIP’s development, it is unsurprising that the party apparently began experiencing a great resurgence in the late 1950s and early 1960s, as the relationship between China and the Soviet Union rapidly deteriorated.³

During the 1940s, Chairman Abdukërim Abbasof (*Abasnofu* 阿巴索夫) was reportedly lukewarm to the idea of an independent Eastern Turkistan. There was support for this prospect within XIP’s Central Committee, but Abbasof refused to allow formal conversation on the matter, preferring the pursuit of global communism to that of local nationalism.⁴ The party as it appeared later with the Sino-Soviet Split, however, was

³ Some sources suggest that the People’s Revolutionary Party remained dissolved during this period, in which case such a renaissance would obviously not have been possible. See, for example, Ma Dazheng 马大正 and Xu Jianying 许建英, “*Dong tujuesitan guo*: *mimeng de huanmie* “东突厥斯坦国”: 迷梦的幻灭 (“Eastern Turkistan”: Disillusionment of the Dream) (Urumqi: Xinjiang renmin chubanshe, 2006), pp. 113-114.

⁴ See Xanbaba (1999), pp. 26-27. This assertion is, of course, conveniently compatible with the politics of later Chinese historiography of Xinjiang and, coming from a source published within the People’s Republic of China, should be viewed with some degree of skepticism.

repurposed as a vehicle for an Eastern Turkistani national liberation struggle. The peculiar interpretation of communism advocated by CCP Chairman Mao Zedong 毛泽东, XIP's leaders argued, was a corruption of Marxist-Leninist ideology and was in fact actively destructive towards Xinjiang's Turkic communities. Denying the communist credentials of the ruling regime, leaders of the People's Revolutionary Party thus framed their movement as a fight for genuine communism, unencumbered by the perceived heresies posed within Mao Zedong Thought. They were pragmatists, however, and knew they could not be foolhardy in the pursuit of their goal. Taking action would require the appropriate planning, timing, and opportunity. China's massively self-destructive Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) would provide all three.

PRC History and Sino-Soviet Relations

After its formal founding in late 1949, the People's Republic of China quickly forged an alliance with the Soviet Union. The Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, however, was more a recognition of the shared ideology between two communist states than an expression of any great mutual admiration. Both Chairman Mao and Soviet leader Josef Stalin had misgivings about the other: Mao was careless and impetuous, while Stalin was calculating and meddlesome. Nonetheless, with Mao's unexpected triumph in the Chinese Civil War, the Soviet Union saw an ideological victory in the world's most populous country, while China saw a source of well-needed economic, technical, and military assistance. Mao further saw in Stalin a model of the kind of leader he aspired to be – an assertive strongman who commanded the respect of rivals and the adoration of subjects. During the early years of the People's Republic, Mao demonstrated a willingness to allow his country to follow the Soviet Union's lead. This situation changed, however, after Stalin died in 1953, to be replaced by

Nikita Khrushchev. Mao's visceral dislike of Khrushchev was immediate. Here was a relative neophyte to elite politics, pretending to demand the same authority as his predecessor vis-à-vis Mao, a seasoned leader who, against all odds, had actually brandished his revolutionary credentials through the communist victory in the Chinese Civil War. Beyond this resentment of Khrushchev on a personal level, moreover, Mao was incensed when, in February of 1956, the Soviet leader publically renounced both Stalin and his cult of personality, thereby ushering an era of de-Stalinization, during which the Soviet Union undid many of the former leader's excesses. Whatever reservations Mao may have had about Stalin the person, he nonetheless greatly admired his leadership style and achievements – the very legacies that Khrushchev now sought to sweep away.⁵

During the Eighth Congress of the Chinese Communist Party, which convened in September of 1956, Head of State Liu Shaoqi 刘少奇 and Vice Premier Deng Xiaoping 邓小平 led proceedings wherein they affirmed de-Stalinization as state policy within the People's Republic. Having only recently relinquished several ceremonial posts to Liu and Deng, Mao now feared that these subordinates were plotting to eliminate his record, just as Khrushchev was eliminating that of Stalin in the Soviet Union. Never would there be a cult of personality in China, Liu and Deng assured, in a pronouncement that Mao interpreted as a targeted personal threat. Nonetheless, the Chairman still held the reins of power in China. A future portended by the acquiescence of his subordinates to Soviet policy – one in which Chairman Mao was forgotten and his contributions erased – was not unavoidable. He could pursue policies that would deviate from those of the Soviet Union, would prove the superiority of his vision to that of Soviets, and would ensure the preservation of his legacy

⁵ See Frank Dikötter, *Mao's Great Famine* (New York: Walker & Co., 2010), pp. 10-13.

within China. These objectives almost certainly lay to some degree behind the trajectory of Chinese politics over the course of the ensuing two decades.

In the aftermath of the Eighth Congress, Mao made an appeal directly to the Chinese people, asking them to weigh in on their perceptions of the state of affairs in the People's Republic. During this "Hundred Flowers Movement," they were encouraged to speak openly and were reassured that their opinions would be taken into consideration and respected. When Mao received a critical mass of negative feedback, however, he abruptly halted the movement and initiated the "Anti-Rightist Campaign" to purge his most vocal critics, reneging on previous promises that freedom of speech would be protected. Meanwhile, dissatisfied with the slow and measured pace of economic and social development that Soviet advisors had laid out in China's first Five Year Plan, Mao grew impatient, calling instead for a "Great Leap Forward" to rapidly thrust China ahead. For this unprecedented effort to succeed, he argued, all people needed to be mobilized. To that end, citizens were organized into a series of large-scale "People's Communes," through which nearly all political, social, economic, agricultural, and industrial activities were to be structured. While the first Five Year Plan had already started a more limited collectivization campaign, the new People's Communes were far more comprehensive – and had effects on production that were highly disruptive. As a result, China's economy suffered, and there were disastrous shortages of food and material throughout China. The hardships brought about by the Great Leap Forward, moreover, were compounded by the unwillingness of local officials, in the midst of a massive purge of Mao's naysayers, to acknowledge that there actually was a problem. It would take millions of deaths and the near collapse of the economy for Liu and Deng to step in and take corrective action.

The Great Leap Forward was a debacle, not only domestically, but also in terms of China's relationship with the Soviet Union. In pursuing the movement's policies, China was disregarding the guidance of Soviet advisors, whom Khrushchev later withdrew out of frustration with Mao's willfulness. Still, the increasing contradictions between the two leaders initially were not yet out in the open. The Treaty of Friendship remained in effect, and Khrushchev was promising the delivery of schematics for the construction of a nuclear weapon by 1959. By the time that date arrived, however, Sino-Soviet relations had deteriorated to such a degree that the Soviet leader rescinded this offer. Within a year, the private quarrels between the two sides developed into a very public exchange of barbs. Meanwhile, as the magnitude of damage done by Great Leap Forward policies became clear, a humiliated Mao faded into the background, allowing Liu and Deng to take measures to restore the Chinese economy to health. All the while, the chairman ruminated over the predicament he had found himself in, yet failed to accept responsibility for the disasters that had befallen his country. He felt that Khrushchev's withdrawal of aid, and not the Great Leap Forward itself, had been responsible for the famine and other hardships that China was confronting. Liu and Deng, meanwhile, struck him as complicit in a Soviet plot to undermine his leadership. Without even consulting him, they were undoing much of what Mao perceived as his revolutionary accomplishments. They regarded him, he later complained, as they would a "dead ancestor."⁶

Chairman Mao was not one to forget a grudge, and thus, it can be said that the Cultural Revolution was at least in part instigated as a means of settling scores against those whom he perceived had wronged him, including the Soviets, Liu Shaoqi, and Deng

⁶ See Maurice Meisner, *Mao's China and After: A History of the People's Republic* (New York: Free Press, 1999), p. 230.

Xiaoping. Ego alone, however, cannot fully explain what was to transpire. There existed genuine differences within the Chinese Communist Party regarding several important issues of governance. For instance, in the interest of global solidarity, must China always blindly follow the Soviet Union's lead? In the interest of peace, just how conciliatory should China be towards its enemies? How accommodating need the state be in implementing its economic and social policies? On all of these questions, various factions diverged, and Mao and his allies viewed such heterodoxy within the ruling party as a significant threat. Thus, in 1966, the chairman returned to the public eye and began a campaign that would pit intraparty factions against one another, not only within the top levels of leadership, but also nationwide.

The "Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution," therefore, was essentially a civil war within the Chinese Communist Party between, ostensibly, the supporters of Mao on one side and the supporters of the Soviet Union – dubbed "revisionists" – on the other. These definitions, however, were fungible because few would actually want to be identified as an opponent to Chairman Mao or a supporter of the Soviet line. Nearly everyone claimed devotion to Mao, and the word "revisionist" was used exclusively as a pejorative against rival persons and factions. In many cases, a determination of who was and was not a supporter of Mao was settled – often absent of oversight – through the use of physical violence. Social cohesion was shattered as neighbors turned on neighbors and their communities were transformed into active warzones. Security forces and local organs of government, moreover, ceased to function as the legitimacy of power holders was constantly challenged. For three years, from mid-1966 to mid-1969, as a matter of state policy, China remained mired in this manner of chaos. The Ninth Congress of the Chinese Communist Party, which convened in April of 1969, was staged as the culminating event of the revolution,

intended to herald the resumption of domestic stability. In reality, however, many of the most violent and detrimental events of the Cultural Revolution would happen *after* this seminal event.

A Narrative History of the Eastern Turkistan People's Revolutionary Party

Still, the story of the Eastern Turkistan People's Revolutionary Party falls primarily within the period leading up to the Ninth Congress. It thrived in the atmosphere created by the Cultural Revolution, during which time its members could organize, network, and train with little chance of being detected by beleaguered local authorities. In many cases, moreover, those same local authorities were themselves involved with the organization, adding an additional cloak on the extent of its activities. Additionally, even if Chinese security forces managed to infiltrate the organization and uncover what it was up to, they might not have recognized what they had stumbled onto, because, in many regards, XIP was no different from the various Maoist factions that were active in Xinjiang during this era. Just like their legally sanctioned counterparts – in which all of XIP's membership also participated – they looted goods, stocked weapons, formed military forces, drew up military plans, engaged in street fights, and fought local authorities. The crucial difference was that, unlike the popular factions, XIP's members did not care about Chairman Mao, nor did they care about Chinese domestic politics. What they did care about was seizing the opportunity to reclaim the independence of their homeland.

Viewed domestically, the Ninth Congress rendered the achievement of that objective more complicated. The revolution was declared over. Local governments and security forces were increasingly stabilized. The mandate for popular factions to act independently was revoked. Despite these developments, however, the People's Revolutionary Party was

granted a lifeline that would briefly extend its existence – and could plausibly have succeeded in delivering an independent Eastern Turkistan. In March of 1969, on the eve of the Ninth Congress, a series of battles erupted along the Sino-Soviet borders in Manchuria to the northeast and Xinjiang to the northwest. The international tensions that had been brewing since the start of the Great Leap Forward were now boiling over, bringing China and the Soviet Union to the brink of war. Each side blamed the other for a series of provocations during the spring and summer of 1969. China's revolutionary leadership used these developments as a means to unify its populace, still hopelessly fractured after years of divisive factionalism. Propaganda called for all citizens to "strengthen war preparedness," and nationwide, entire communities were mobilized to engage in the construction of tunnels and air raid shelters, and to organize and train as armed militias prepared to face the enemy in a moment's notice.

Xinjiang would be a critical battlefield in any armed conflict between China and the Soviet Union. A massive but sparsely populated region sharing more than 3200 kilometers of border with the Soviet Union, it was particularly vulnerable because, on the one hand, large segments of its majority indigenous populations were less than enamored with Chinese rule and, on the other hand, it was home to China's most sensitive nuclear weapons facilities. As tensions mounted, the Soviet Union would exploit both of these liabilities. Soviet diplomats and propagandists globally released test balloons regarding the possibility of a surgical strike to be executed against nuclear sites in Xinjiang. At the same time, it made increasingly flagrant overtures towards Xinjiang's discontents, and in particular, the Eastern Turkistan People's Revolutionary Party. Propaganda transmitted from mobile transmitters broadcasting from undisclosed mountain locations, as well as from the Soviet cities of Almaty and Tashkent, assured listeners that the Soviet Union supported their cause and was

coming to their rescue. If XIP stood a resistance against the Chinese, the Soviet Union would have its back. And so on this late August afternoon in 1969, XIP fighters occupied the hilltop tamarisk grove overlooking the border village of Karajul, in futile expectation of salvation that would never come.

The heretofore relatively obscure story of the Eastern Turkistan People's Revolutionary Party offers a look at the various threads that bound the experiences of Mao-era Xinjiang, its leadership, its dissidents, its diaspora, and the contemporary issue of Eastern Turkistan. It comes at the historical apex and confluence of three important trends, each of which shaped the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region into the fascinating and volatile place that it is today. First, it is the story of Mao-era China's often dysfunctional struggle to establish its own legitimacy, particularly in its territorial margins. Second, it is the story of the deterioration of relations between China and the Soviet Union, an earth-shattering Cold War development that drew China closer to the Western world, but also very nearly could have led to nuclear war. Third, and most importantly, it is the story of an imagined Eastern Turkistani nation, an identity that encompasses all the various Turki-speaking and predominantly Muslim peoples who are indigenous to the territory of Xinjiang. The Eastern Turkistan People's Revolutionary Party of the Cultural Revolution era marked a transition between two generations of Eastern Turkistan activists. It was a final major campaign for some who had founded and participated in two pre-1949 independent Eastern Turkistan republics during the 1930s and 1940s. At the same time, it was a first campaign for a new band of dissident activists, some of whom remain involved in the cause to this day.

This book provides a narrative history of the Eastern Turkistan People's Revolutionary Party, taking into account the domestic Chinese and international contexts that surrounded the case. That the party existed in the first place is remarkable. Then, as

now, there was little room for alternatives in China to the Chinese Communist Party. The constitution does allow for “allied democratic parties,” but these minor organizations neither differ ideologically from nor challenge the primacy of the ruling party. They create the veneer but not substance of a democracy. Here, however, was a rival Marxist-Leninist party denying the legitimacy of the ruling regime. It had behind it the experience, organizational scope, and agenda that would have been conducive to the formation of a credible government within an independent Eastern Turkistan. There have been few if any other such historically verifiable organizations within the People’s Republic of China. As a matter of Xinjiang history, moreover, the story is significant in that it offers a window into daily life, ideology, and dissent in the region during the Mao era, a period about which, for a number of reasons, there has been little previous substantive research. This is the backdrop against which Uyghur intellectuals during the 1980s, defeated and resigned to recognize the implausibility of any ambition for an independent homeland, nursed grievances both towards their lost opportunity and towards the Chinese regime that had denied its realization. The People’s Revolutionary Party further lies in the purview of the later resurgence of Eastern Turkistan-related activity from the early 1990s. Since that time numerous groups of varying ideologies and methods – including those espousing militant and violent interpretations of Islamic *jihad* – have claimed the mantle of this movement. In short, understanding this often overlooked moment in history is crucial to understanding the developments that followed.

Sources

When it comes to Xinjiang, everyone has an angle. A story told by one author from within China might be completely at odds with that told by a different author outside of China, and a writer in one part of the Eastern Turki diaspora may likewise diverge on details

from a writer elsewhere in the diaspora. For all interested parties, history is a tool to be leveraged and manipulated to meet specific political objectives. “When good historians write history,” writes Paul A. Cohen,

their primary objective is to construct, on the basis of the evidence available, as accurate and truthful an understanding of the past as possible. Mythologizers, in a sense, do the reverse. Certainly mythologizers start out with *an* understanding of the past, which in many (though not all) cases they may sincerely believe to be “correct.” Their purpose, however, is not to enlarge upon or deepen this understanding. Rather, it is to draw on it to serve the political, ideological, rhetorical, and/or psychological needs of the present.⁷

Cognizant or not of their complicity, historians both from within the People’s Republic of China and from the global Eastern Turki diaspora engage in mythologized histories.

Gardner Bovingdon explains,

The party-state has long relied on official histories to justify its political and military control over Xinjiang, vindicate Han immigration there, and inspire confidence in its economic policies... Conversely, Uyghur nationalist histories have provided a charter for Uyghur identity, underscored the centrality of Islam in Uyghur life, and offered Uyghurs both precedent and warrant for their resistance to Chinese rule... Historical works produced by official Chinese historians and Uyghur nationalists are fundamentally incompatible, because their purposes are opposed. Uyghur intellectuals are waging a desperate struggle to prove that Uyghurs constitute a nation and that that nation can rightfully claim the territory of Xinjiang as its homeland. Historians writing for the Chinese state labor to deny both claims, asserting instead that Uyghurs belong to the Chinese nation and Xinjiang to the territory of China.⁸

⁷ See Paul A. Cohen, “The Contested Past: The Boxers as History and Myth,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 51, no. 1 (February 1992), p. 82.

⁸ See Gardner Bovingdon, “Contested Histories,” in S. Frederick Starr, ed., *Xinjiang: China’s Muslim Borderland*, (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2004), p. 353.

An outside historian looking these sources must thus keep two principles in mind: first, both perspectives cannot simultaneously be objectively true; and second, neither can be dismissed outright.

The sources used in this study are thus admittedly flawed. They contain political and ideological biases that potentially distort the story of the Eastern Turkistan People's Revolutionary Party. Three parties, each with their own agendas – the Chinese, the Eastern Turkistan separatists, and the Soviets – were witness to what transpired. There were no independent observers to offer an outside perspective. Yet this is not adequate justification to outright disqualify the sources available. Absent the information found therein, the history would simply never be told, and that would be an unfortunate historical omission. The Eastern Turkistan People's Revolutionary Party is worthy of review. The topic is relevant and significant, not only as a bridge between pre and post-Mao era histories, but also as a consideration in understanding contemporary Xinjiang. Thus I present this story using the sources available, imperfect as they may be.

Despite the clear desires of some to project unity to a global audience, the Eastern Turkistan diaspora is and always has been fragmented. During the first and second Eastern Turkistan Republics, divisions between Islamist, nationalist, and leftist factions complicated the ever-elusive goal of formulating a national ideological consensus. Each had its own respective agenda. Islamists sought piety in government, while nationalists focused on the formation of a secular Eastern Turki identity. Leftists, meanwhile, found inspiration in the egalitarian ideals of Marxism. While there was some common ground to be found in the center, the differences between the former and latter factions were often irreconcilable. When the Communists emerged victorious in the Chinese Civil War and founded the People's Republic of China in 1949, most leftists, many nationalists, and some Islamists fell

in line with the new regime. Others, however, formed bases of resistance that would taunt Chinese rule in Xinjiang for decades to come.

With the hardships met through radical political campaigns and aggressive crackdowns in the region under the rule of the Chinese Communist Party, many of these dissidents would flee and reorganize abroad. Religious factions turned for support towards their coreligionists in places such as Turkey and Pakistan. Nationalists, meanwhile, sought approval from the United States and the Republic of China in Taiwan. Later, as Sino-Soviet relations deteriorated and as leftists grew increasingly disillusioned with the Chinese regime, they too would form a countervailing leftist faction based in Soviet Central Asia. While they shared a common love for their homeland, each of these factions carrying the mantle of “Eastern Turkistan” harbored distinctive ideological aims, even in exile. These differences were manifest – and continue to be manifest – in the diasporic literature that each produced. Thus, considering their divergent political perspectives, Uyghur authors in Istanbul, Almaty, and Taipei respectively might have very different things to say about almost anything.

At any given moment, Xinjiang historians within the People’s Republic, meanwhile, are compelled to present a consistent narrative (although, as policy objectives evolve, potentially so too do the stories they tell). Since the 1990s, the Center for Research on the History and Geography of the Chinese Frontier, part of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, has been tasked with controlling historical research regarding Xinjiang’s stability. Deputy Director Ma Dazheng 马大正 in particular has been a prolific writer on this topic. Not long after the release of the State Council’s article regarding terrorism in Xinjiang, he compiled ten years of research into *The National Interest Above All: Observation and Reflection on Xinjiang’s Stability Problem*, published by Xinjiang People’s Press in 2003. The book’s second chapter, a 1996 report detailing China’s fight against separatism in Xinjiang from 1950 to

1995, was the starting point for research of the Eastern Turkistan People's Revolutionary Party. In the decades following the dissident organization's defeat, very little information about it was published, or at least made publically available. Most of the already sparse materials written about the Cultural Revolution in Xinjiang omitted this particular episode. While Ma Dazheng's report dates to 1996, it is only with the publication of the 2003 book that somewhat detailed scholarship was presented for public consumption – and even then, as per a designation on its title page, the book was only intended for “internal distribution” (*neibu faxing* 内部发行), meaning that the dissemination of its content was meant to be restricted. Nonetheless, in the summer of 2008, *The National Interest Above All* was displayed prominently in Xinhua Bookstores throughout the region, and I had no difficulty purchasing a copy for myself.

Ma's account of the Eastern Turkistan People's Revolutionary Party is detailed but brief, occupying a total of four pages.⁹ Initially, I was under the mistaken impression that, through visits to bookstores and libraries in Xinjiang, I would be able to uncover more secondary sources to expand on the information contained in Ma's report. Part of the challenge in following up on this idea, however, was knowing where to look. I quickly learned that, in general, most histories of China printed in the People's Republic end with its founding in 1949. Chairman Mao's legacy and the Chinese Communist Party's legitimacy are inexorably linked. In 1981 with the *Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of Our Party*, the Party was forced to seek forgiveness and atone for the sins of the Great Helmsman.¹⁰ The

⁹ See Ma Dazheng 马大正, *Guojia lishi gaoyu yiqie: Xinjiang wending wenti de guancha yu sikao* 国家利益高于一切：新疆稳定问题的观察与思考 (National Interest Above All Else: Analysis and Reflections on Xinjiang's Stability Problem) (Urumqi: Xinjiang renmin chubanshe, 2003), pp. 42-45.

¹⁰ See Chinese Communist Party Central Committee, *Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of Our Party since the Founding of the People's Republic of China* (27 June 1981), Marxists Internet Archive, <http://www.marxists.org/subject/china/documents/cpc/history/01.htm> (accessed 4 February 2014).

excesses of his tenure were genuinely traumatic for many people, including many in the Party leadership, and assigning scapegoats alone would not suffice to explain his actions, nor to justify the dramatic about-face that the Party took after his death. To confront this challenge, the drafters of the resolution turned to Mao's own words:

It is necessary to make a clear distinction between right and wrong, between achievements and shortcomings and to make clear which of the two is primary and which secondary. For instance, do the achievements amount to 30 per cent or to 70 per cent of the whole? It will not do either to understate or to overstate. We must have a fundamental evaluation of a person's work and establish whether his achievements amount to 30 per cent and his mistakes to 70 per cent, or vice versa. If his achievements amount to 70 per cent of the whole, then his work should [on the whole be approved].¹¹

On this basis, therefore, Party elites declared that Chairman Mao had been seventy percent right and thirty percent wrong. Disastrous missteps such as the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution could be wrong, while the Chairman – and by extension the Chinese Communist Party – could be right overall.

This proportion, while ideologically sound, is somewhat problematic when measured against the legacy of Mao's time at the helms of Chinese politics. The Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution alone account temporally for more than half of his 27 years in that role. In order to justify a more favorable ratio, therefore, the Party needed to look backward towards Mao's record pre-liberation. With events before 1949, it would be easier to spin failures as successes and mistakes as enlightenment; after that date, everyone was all too aware of the true consequences of his decisions. Thus, historians focus their energies on the more positive pre-1949 history, avoiding the minefield of the Mao era, where one

¹¹ See Mao Zedong, "Leadership and Party Committees," in *Quotations of Mao Zedong*, chapter 10, trans. David Quentin (Peking: Peking Foreign Languages Press, 1966) <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/works/red-book/ch10.htm> (accessed 15 January 2014).

semantic misstep can threaten the legitimacy of the Chinese Communist Party. This fact, however, does not prevent some carefully vetted individuals from attempting that history, even in Xinjiang. One such author is Zhu Peimin 朱培民, a historian at the Xinjiang Regional Party Committee School whose 2000 book *Research on Xinjiang's Twentieth Century History* offers chapters on Xinjiang past 1949. In his chapter about the Cultural Revolution in Xinjiang, Zhu identifies key events, both positive and negative, during the ten years associated with that campaign, using as a guide the *Resolution on Certain Questions*.¹² This chapter, however, assumes some prior knowledge of relevant events and dates, as one might find in the chapter on Xinjiang's Cultural Revolution in *A Concise History of Contemporary Xinjiang*, edited by Dang Yulin 党育林 and Zhang Yuxi 张玉玺. This work provides a fairly straightforward, general account of the course of the Cultural Revolution within Xinjiang.¹³ Both books are useful in steering the reader towards significant events, but are short in detail; neither provides any additional information regarding the People's Revolutionary Party.

Ultimately, the most detailed secondary history of the Cultural Revolution in Xinjiang remains one that required neither travel to the region nor the use of Chinese or Uyghur language reading skills. Nearly half of Donald H. McMillen's 1979 study *Chinese Communist Power and Policy in Xinjiang, 1949-1977* focuses on events from that era, using accounts from the Chinese and local media as primary sources.¹⁴ Given the time of its publication, McMillen is writing not as a historian, but rather about current events in the

¹² See Zhu Peimin 朱培民, *20 shiji Xinjiang shi yanjiu* 20 世纪新疆史研究 [Research on Xinjiang's Twentieth Century History] (Urumqi: Xinjiang renmin chubanshe, 2000), pp. 308-325.

¹³ See Dang Yulin 党育林 and Zhang Yuxi 张玉玺, eds., *Dangdai xinjiang jianshi* 当代新疆简史 (A Concise History of Contemporary Xinjiang) (Beijing: Dangdai zhongguo chubanshe, 2003), pp. 241-263.

¹⁴ See Donald H. McMillen, *Chinese Communist Power and Policy in Xinjiang, 1949-1977* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1979), pp. 180-318. Since his research is based almost exclusively on official news sources from the period, he is only able to offer a particular version of the events transpiring in Xinjiang during this period.

region; this is primarily a political science work. Absent the benefit of hindsight, McMillen assigns great significance to matters that later Chinese historians ignore. At the same time, he provides more detail about the events that they do identify as being important. *Chinese Communist Power and Policy*, however, is extremely dense, and is presented largely without context. In order to fully appreciate the book's content, a strong command of wider national events in the Cultural Revolution is required. The volume is challenging to use on its own; nonetheless, used in coordination with the Chinese histories, it serves a valuable and fairly comprehensive guide to the local politics. Still, in all its comprehensiveness, it fails to directly mention the People's Revolutionary Party.

In short, XIP generally does not appear in secondary histories of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. That being said, however, increasing numbers of books about Eastern Turkistan and the "Xinjiang problem" have been published in China since 2001. Unfortunately, when it comes to the People's Revolutionary Party, many of these sources only contain the same information, often copied verbatim, from the four pages that Ma Dazheng devoted to the topic in his 1996 report. A small number do go into a little bit more detail, though, and are worth mentioning here. First of all, *Xinjiang of China: Its Past and Present*, edited by Li Sheng 厉声 and with publications starting in 2005, was ubiquitous in Xinjiang's Xinhua Bookstores during each of my journeys to the region. This book is clearly written to be widely distributed, both domestically and abroad. It is sold as a fairly thick single volume, or subdivided by chapter as cheaper, smaller booklets. In addition to its original Chinese, it has authorized translations in English, French, German, Japanese, Russian, Arabic, Turkish, Uyghur, and Kazakh.¹⁵ As I was sweeping bookstores for

¹⁵ For all the scholarship that has been written about Xinjiang outside of China, little from within China has been translated for audiences abroad. *Xinjiang of China* was likely written and promoted so aggressively in order to present a Chinese point-of-view and to cast a sympathetic light on Chinese governance over the region.

materials in 2008, I inadvertently bought four copies for myself, one each in English, Uyghur, and Chinese, as well as a fourth copy in subdivided form. A second book that provides some new detail is *“Eastern Turkistan”: Disillusionment of the Dream*, a 2006 collaboration between Ma Dazheng and his colleague Xu Jianying 许建英. Ten years after writing the report that in 2003 appeared in *The National Interest Above All*, Ma revisits the issue, elaborating on and modifying some previous points in view of China’s changing post-2001 political orientations.¹⁶ Finally, *The History and Present Situation of “Eastern Turkistan,”* published by Minzu Press in 2008, presents a fairly decent overview of the development of China’s contemporary problems with Eastern Turkistan-related separatism, including a brief section on the Eastern Turkistan People’s Revolutionary Party.¹⁷ Regardless, the new information contained in each of these sources contributes little to a wider understanding of this topic. Ma Dazheng and other historians simply have access to materials that are going to be unavailable to a foreign scholar who attempts to approach so sensitive a topic.¹⁸

A small number of libraries outside of China hold microfiche copies of the *Xinjiang Daily* newspaper, a source that potentially could provide some supplemental information to what can be found in the aforementioned secondary histories. In most of these collections, however, there is a conspicuous omission of material dating from the Cultural Revolution era. Thus when I learned that Yale University’s Sterling Memorial Library holds a complete run of the newspaper, I believed I was on the cusp of a major breakthrough – surely the news of the day would report on the affair. I stayed three months in New Haven, scouring

¹⁶ Ma Dazheng 马大正 and Xu Jianying 许建英, *“Dong tujuesitan guo”: mimeng de huanmie “东突厥斯坦国”: 迷梦的幻灭* (“Eastern Turkistan”: Disillusionment of the Dream) (Urumqi: Xinjiang renmin chubanshe, 2006).

¹⁷ See Pan Zhiping 潘志平, Wang Mingye 王鸣野, and Shi Lan 石岚, *“Dong tu” de lishi yu xianzhuang “东突”的历史与现状* (The History and Present Situation of “Eastern Turkistan”) (Beijing: Minzu chubanshe, 2008).

¹⁸ For example, local Red Guard newspapers, official reportage on the affair, police records, and original party newspapers and other materials attributed to XIP, referenced in Chinese sources.

the newspaper for further details on the case. Never did it occur to me that if the newspaper did contain material relating to the Eastern Turkistan People's Revolutionary Party, it would have already been reflected in Donald H. McMillen's *Chinese Communist Power and Policy*, which used the *Xinjiang Daily* as a primary source. The newspaper obviously provides an invaluable trove of information about Xinjiang's Cultural Revolution – at least the information that was seen fit to print by whoever controlled Xinjiang's official propaganda news mouthpiece at any given moment during the era – but no direct reference to XIP. For some while, this led me to question whether the Party even ever truly existed. Was this case fabricated? It seemed odd that an organization later deemed so historically consequential was so ignored by the press of the time.¹⁹ If it was such a grave threat to Chinese rule in Xinjiang, moreover, why does not it not appear in histories covering the era? The only discernable evidence I could find of XIP's existence seemed to be in secondary sources written to justify a hard line against Eastern Turkistan-related activity in the present.²⁰

Beyond these reasons to doubt, moreover, I could not ignore the case of the Inner Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party. XIP's alleged Inner Mongolian counterpart appeared at much the same time, had a similar name, had a correspondingly non-Han (non-ethnic Chinese) membership, and was purportedly similar structurally. Xinjiang's Vice-Chairman Muhemmet'imin Iminof was implicated with the Eastern Turkistan Party, while Inner Mongolia's Chairman Ulanhu was implicated with the Inner Mongolian Party. In face of the perceived threat that the counterrevolutionary organization posed, Inner Mongolia's

¹⁹ In this, I betray my naïveté regarding the newspapers of the Cultural Revolution. I would have expected the *Xinjiang Daily* to report on at least some substantive local news. Propagating news of dissident activity, however, might have encouraged others to join in the fight. Still, that kind of news, I later learned, would have been published in Red Guard publications.

²⁰ History in the People's Republic of China is used as a political tool. The details of an organization such as XIP might be unveiled – and possibly manipulated – only when they are politically useful for contemporary policy objectives.

revolutionary government unleashed a brutal campaign in the region, specifically targeting ethnic Mongols under suspicion of separatist sentiment. This far-reaching purge terrorized local populations and resulted in the deaths of tens of thousands. After the fall of the Gang of Four, however, Inner Mongolia's post-Mao leadership made a devastating admission: the Inner Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party had never actually existed. The campaign was waged purely for political reasons. With this in mind, it was wholly reasonable for me to likewise question the validity of assertions that there had been an Eastern Turkistan People's Revolutionary Party.

Thus discouraged, I turned my research into a new direction. In his 1996 report, Ma Dazheng implicated Muhemmet'imin Iminof as having been a leader of the People's Revolutionary Party (in 2006, he omits this information). Iminof, sometimes alternatively spelled Iminov or Iminop, is a name that I had often read in passing in accounts of Mao-era Xinjiang. The man behind the name, however, remained a mystery. Who was this individual with a russified name, apparently a high-ranking early Chinese Communist Party member who was accused of having betrayed the People's Republic? With this question, I assembled what scant information I could find on Iminof. He was born to a wealthy peasant family in Artush (*Atush*, or *Atushi* 阿图什) in 1915. He became proficient in Russian while a student at a high school of science and technology in Yarkant (*Yeken*, or *Shache* 沙车), and assisted with translation for his father's trade office in the Soviet Union. While in the Soviet Union, he trained himself in Marxist philosophy. He worked as an engineer for Xinjiang's provincial government, and later joined the National Army of the Eastern Turkistan Republic. Iminof joined the Chinese Communist Party in 1950. Following Liberation, he alternatively enjoyed high status and suffered scorn within Mao's China, and ultimately died

on May 17, 1970.²¹ The biographic entries do not delve into the circumstances surrounding Iminof's death, but the search for details of his passing provided a key breakthrough in my study of the Eastern Turkistan People's Revolutionary Party.

In 1999, Chinese-American journalist Cao Chang-ching referred to Iminof's death in an article for the *Taipei Times*. "On May 29, 1970, 30 Uighur intellectuals were executed in Hongqiao (洪桥) on the outskirts of [Xinjiang's capital] Urumqi [Ürümchi or Wulumuqi 乌鲁木齐]. Even the Vice-Chairman of the Xinjiang Autonomy [sic] Region, Iminov, was secretly murdered in the municipal hospital where he was being treated for an 'illness.'"²² The early biographical references that I consulted stated without explanation that Iminof simply died; now, this article was suggesting that he had been deliberately murdered. Curious, I sent Cao an email asking for his source. In his response, he directed me to Ablikim Baqi Iltebir. When I contacted him, Iltebir was working at the Uyghur-language desk for the news organization *Radio Free Asia*, located in Washington, DC. A Xinjiang native, he was childhood friends with Muhemmet'imin Iminof's son Polat. It was widely recognized, according to Iltebir, that the elder Iminof had been administered a shot of poison while convalescing in an Urumqi hospital in May of 1970. Additionally, Iltebir revealed to me that he was intimately aware that an Eastern Turkistan People's Revolutionary Party did in fact exist, and that Iminof was indeed a leader in that organization. After all, Iltebir himself had been a member.

²¹ See Ji Dachun 纪大椿, ed., *Xinjiang lishi cidian* 新疆历史词典 (A Historical Dictionary of Xinjiang), (Urumqi: Xinjiang renmin chubanshe, 1996), p. 216. See also Shērip Xushtar, *Shinjang yēqinqi zaman tarixidiki meshhur shexsler* (Famous Personalities in Modern Xinjiang History) (Urumqi: Shinjang xelq neshriyati, 2007), pp. 78-82.

²² See Cao Chang-ching, "Vestiges of Colonialism in East Turkestan," *Taipei Times* (16 October 1999): 9, <http://www.taipetimes.com/News/insight/archives/1999/10/16/0000006674/1> (accessed 21 December 2012).

The majority of those imprisoned for their involvement in the People's Revolutionary Party were released in the spirit of post-revolutionary reconciliation from the late 1970s through the mid-1980s. A small number of these XIP veterans subsequently moved into the global diaspora. Ablikim Baqi Iltebir was one of these. The story of the Eastern Turkistan People's Revolutionary Party has thus been kept alive through the reporting of *Radio Free Asia*. Another is Abdurreshid Haji Kërimi, whose 2006 memoir *The Battle in Karajul* tells both a detailed story of the Cultural Revolution in Kashgar (*Qeshqer*, or *Kashi* 喀什) and perhaps the most thorough available account of the People's Revolutionary Party. Finally, Sabit Abduraxman and Axmet Ėgemberdi, co-editors of XIP's *Oyghan* newspaper, immigrated to Kazakhstan upon their release from prison. Abduraxman, who died in 2005, was a prolific writer of materials related to his homeland, and served as a chief source for Kazakhstan-based Uyghur historian Qehriman Ghojamberdi's *The Uyghurs: An Ethnopolitical History from Ancient Times to the Present Day*. Published in 2008, this Russian-language secondary history contains a fairly detailed chapter on Xinjiang's Cultural Revolution, including a section on the People's Revolutionary Party.²³

Among the additional materials that Iltebir directed me towards was *The Story of My Life*, the autobiography of Seypidin Ezizi, who during the Cultural Revolution rose to serve as both Xinjiang Chairman and Party Committee Secretary. No other non-Han individual before or since has possessed the status that Seypidin enjoyed during this time. His book does not cover the Cultural Revolution period, but rather tells of the founding of the original People's Revolutionary Party during the Three Districts Revolution of the 1940s.²⁴ Ma

²³ See Kaxarman Xodžamberdi, *Uygury: etnopolitičeskaja istorija s drevnijšix vremen do našix dnei* (The Uyghurs: An Ethnopolitical History from Ancient Times to the Present Day) (Almaty: Izdatel'skij dom "Mir," 2008), pp. 590-635.

²⁴ See Seypidin Ezizi, *Ömür dastani, eslime 2: tengritaghda güldürmama* (The Story of My Life, Volume 2: Storm in the Tianshan Range) (Beijing: Milletler neshriyati, 1990), pp. 107-120.

Dazheng and other Chinese historians of Eastern Turkistan suggest the interconnectedness between different movements past and present, but I nonetheless originally approached this project almost with the expectation that the party was purely a product of the Cultural Revolution. By guiding me towards this source, however, Iltebir encouraged me to reassess that approach, and I quickly discovered that the links between XIP during the two eras were not insignificant. Equipped with this realization, I turned also to the memoirs of Enwer Xanbaba, who, like Seypidin, was a founding member of the original People's Revolutionary Party but who, unlike Seypidin, suffered during the Cultural Revolution under accusations that he was involved with XIP.²⁵ With this core of materials, a story began to take shape.

Xinjiang and Eastern Turkistan

Located in China's far northwest, the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region shares borders with Mongolia, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India. Domestically, it abuts Qinghai, Tibet, and Gansu. Stretching across more than 1.6 million square kilometers, it is China's largest provincial-level political unit, containing a full one-sixth of that country's total area. In fact, if it were to stand alone as a sovereign state, Xinjiang would be ranked the world's seventeenth largest country by land area, just smaller than Libya, but larger than Iran. The mere suggestion that Xinjiang could be independent, however, is a fraught proposition. The lands that today comprise the region were historically inhabited by a wide variety of peoples who shared links of trade, tribute, alliance, and warfare with successive polities in China's Central States core. Still, only very rarely did these neighborly bonds involve the direct political control of East over West, and

²⁵ See Enwer Xanbaba (1999), pp. 10-79. See also Enwer Xanbaba, "Hayatimdin xatiriler" (Records from my Life), *Shinjang tarix matëriyalliri* (Xinjiang Historical Materials), No. 40 (Urumqi: Shinjang xelq neshriyati, 1996), pp. 228-375.

such arrangements, when they did happen, were typically short-lived. Nor did East ever exert significant cultural influence over West. Periodic Central States governance over pockets of the ancient West never resulted in the widespread adoption of Chinese language or traditions. It was only when the foreign Manchus conquered both the Central States and these Western Regions that East and West were forced into a more lasting union, under the suzerainty of the Manchu Great Qing Empire (1644-1912). In view of claims that China has five thousand years of history, the fact that it lacks a significant historical mandate over Xinjiang leads to feelings of insecurity regarding that region. Thus while contemporary Chinese historians spin their accounts of Xinjiang's early history to suggest it has since ancient times been an inalienable part of China, that view does not strictly comport with reality.

Equally dubious, however, is the claim by some proponents of Eastern Turkistan that the diverse peoples who call Xinjiang home today are the same as those who inhabited the region in the distant past. Xinjiang is a land of extremes. It possesses some of China's highest and lowest elevations, as well as coldest and hottest climates. The Tarim Basin, located in its southern half, is bounded to the southeast by the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau, to the south by the Kunlun Mountain Range, to the southwest by the Karakorum Mountain Range, to the west by the Pamir Mountain Range, and to the north by the Tianshan Range. In the rain shadow at the center of this geographic neighborhood lies the vast Taklimakan Desert, an area larger than the states of Indiana, Ohio, and Kentucky combined, whose intense heat and shifting sands make much of it an inhospitable terrain for most life. Xinjiang's northern half too is bounded by mountains, with the Tianshan Range to the south, the Altay Mountains to the northeast, and the Tarbagatai Mountains to the northwest. Because the Tarbagatai Mountains are relatively porous, however, the Zungharian Basin is less affected

by rain shadow and possesses major rivers and fertile grasslands. Thus the Tianshan Range acts as a natural barrier separating two very different kinds of environments. The peoples who historically inhabited each of these respective environments too were very different, and a political union between these peoples was not a natural development.

The scattered oases at the northern and southern rims of the Tarim Basin, watered with runoff from high altitude mountain snows, were inhabited by sedentary agricultural peoples. Each oasis lay at great distance from the next, and travel from one to another involved several days journey across harsh desert terrain. As forbidding as the mountains may be in providing outlets to oasis dwellers, that journey was sometimes no more challenging than movement within the basin. For this reason, cities historically rarely banded together in any more than relatively small regional clusters, and often operated as constellations of independent city states. Empires from beyond the mountains – from the Central States to the east, from Central Asia to the west, from India, Tibet, and Persia to the south, from the Zungharian Basin to the north – moreover occasionally stretched into the Tarim Basin. As a result, the populations of each respective oasis were often historically distinct, containing different mixes of peoples and influences from different directions. By the time of the Qing conquest in the mid-eighteenth century, the population of the region was predominantly Turki speaking and Muslim. It largely lacked, however, a sense of uniform national identity. In general, people identified more with their respective oasis homes than with the regional whole.

The steppelands of the Zungharian Basin proved an inviting atmosphere for nomadic pastoralists. The various peoples who inhabited the lands north of the Tianshan Range were typically skilled riders who possessed strong and sturdy breeds of horses for labor, transport, and warfare. Raiding horsemen frequently proved a menace to the

sedentary peoples living to their peripheries. It was in response to these attacks that Emperor Qin Shi during the third century BCE ordered the construction of what would become China's first Great Wall. In the second century BCE, Emperor Wu of Han dispatched military officer Zhang Qian 张骞 westward on a fateful journey to forge alliances against the Xiongnu, a nomadic empire that threatened the western reaches of the Central States. Zhang's exploits in foreign territory, during which he was captured by the Xiongnu and even took a Xiongnu bride, ultimately precipitated the earliest forays of Central States armies into the regions that would come to be known as Xinjiang. For a brief subsequent period, Han military colonies along the northern Tarim Basin would serve to protect oasis allies as well as East-West trade routes along the metaphorical Silk Road; this was a model that would be emulated time and again in the Tarim Basin by future Central States polities. Over the course of history, steppes empires – Xiongnu, Turk, and Mongol, among others – all rose and fell in the Zungharian Basin. The last major nomadic empire in the region was the eponymous Zungharian Khanate, an Oirat Mongol confederation defeated and subsequently exterminated during the Manchu conquest, in a campaign of genocide that was ordered by Qing Emperor Qianlong in 1755. The region now largely depopulated, Kazakhs, Turkis, and other settlers from throughout the empire thereupon moved in – only some of them willingly. In view of the historical diversity of rival peoples inhabiting the Zungharian and Tarim Basins, we can conclude that the notion of a primordial Eastern Turki identity thus does not stand to scrutiny. Most of these peoples contributed to the makeup of contemporary Xinjiang's native populations, but they were not, as some suggest, one in the same.

Following conquest, it would be more than a century before the Qing Empire would formally adopt the provincial title *Xinjiang* to refer to its far western territorial acquisitions.

The Tarim Basin was known as the Muslim Frontier (*Huijiang* 回疆) while the north was Zungharia (*Zhunbu* 准部). Collectively they were referred as the Western Regions (*Xiyu* 西域), a generic term used historically to describe all lands – not just imperial territories – west of the Central States. Through much of the Qing period, Manchuria, the Central States, Tibet, Mongolia, and the Western Regions were each administered separately. The Qing court was Manchu, while the provincial system was something foreign, a Chinese institution. As such, there was little reason to introduce Chinese provincehood to the empire's peripheral regions. Nonetheless, Chinese intellectual Gong Zizhen 龚自珍 wrote an appeal to the Qing court in 1820, suggesting that the Western Regions be admitted as a province. *Xinjiang's Local History*, the primary textbook used to teach that subject in contemporary Xinjiang high schools, suggests that the intent of Gong's essay was to “achieve national unity and resist the increasingly serious challenges on the northwestern frontier.”²⁶ In reality, however, Gong viewed provincehood as a means to an end of fulfilling a kind of manifest destiny, completing conquests that had been started by the forbearers of the Chinese and Manchus. The Manchus possessed lands that abutted the sea to the east and the sea to the south. To the north they had subdued Mongolian tribes, opening a passageway to expand to the sea in the north. Gong points out that during his reign, Tang Emperor Gaozong (r. 649-683) had conquered territory as far as 17,000 *li* (by Tang-era measurements, roughly 5,500 kilometers) west of the capital, but yet the Buddhist sutras considered the Western Regions only to be the center of continent. The extent of the lands to the north was estimable, whereas the west was vast and inestimable. Those who had claimed to rule all under heaven had in reality only ever ruled the eastern periphery. Keeping the West would honor the

²⁶ See Metrozi Hëyt, ed., *Shinjangning yerlik tarixi* (Xinjiang's Local History) (Urumqi: Shinjang uniwersiteti neshriyati, 1992), p. 417.

legacies of past rulers, and if the Great Qing Empire were to keep pushing, it could expand even to the western seas, thereby completing its destiny and stretching its borders to each of the four seas.²⁷

More than just a call for an expansionistic crusade, however, Gong's essay was a response to detractors of Qing border policy, who had argued that capturing and maintaining the Western Regions had been too great a cost in money, labor, and lives. The lands were too distant, their peoples were too foreign, and the returns on the investment were too negligible for the expenses to be justified. The critics posed that these were reasons to cut the territories off from the empire, whereas Gong instead considered them to be reasons to draw them closer. It was expensive to keep the Western Regions, but so too was it expensive to maintain Guizhou province, located in the interior of the Central States. Wealthier provinces already subsidized poorer provinces, and they could likewise support the Western Regions as a province. By establishing a Chinese-style bureaucracy and dislodging indigenous forms of governance, more direct trade could be established between the West and the interior provinces. Within twenty years, the investment would have paid for itself. While the peoples of the west were foreign, settlers from the Central States could be sent to settle its lands, and place names could be changed in order to conform to Chinese nomenclature.²⁸

Gong Zizhen's 1820 proposal went nowhere, but it nonetheless proved quite prophetic. After having squelched the long-standing anti-Qing Muslim Rebellion (1862-1877), General Zuo Zongtang 左宗棠 in 1884 approached the court with a plan very similar

²⁷ See Gong Zizhen 龚自珍 "Xiyu zhi xingsheng yi" 西域置行省议 (Proposal To Establish a Province in the Western Regions), *Gong ding'an quanji leibian* 龚定盦全集类编 (The Complete Works of Gong Ding'an), edited by Xia Tianlan 夏田蓝 (Shanghai: Shijie shuju, 1937) pp. 164-171.

²⁸ See Gong Zizhen 龚自珍.

to that laid out in Gong's treatise. The "Western Regions" appellation, however, would be inappropriate as a name – it was used to refer collectively to Zungharia and the Muslim Frontier, but also to refer more broadly to all of the lands west of the Central States.²⁹ There was another name by which the Western Regions had been referred informally from as early as the late eighteenth century: the "New Frontier," or *Xinjiang*.³⁰ As had been encouraged by Gong Zizhen six decades prior, provincehood for Xinjiang meant the introduction of a Chinese-style bureaucracy. Civil servants were imported from the interior, and new schools were established as a means to integrate residents into the greater Qing order. The move was used as a model to be emulated in other border regions. Taiwan was granted provincehood in 1885. In 1905, Manchuria was split into Liaoning, Jilin, and Heilongjiang provinces, and in 1907 Mongolia was provincialized.³¹

Contemporary Chinese historians herald the provincialization of Xinjiang as a monumental historical achievement, but this was a transformation from the top down. From the bottom up, another transformation was leading to the recognition of shared national identity. This is partially the result of the imposition of Qing borders on the Western Regions. Where the various peoples north and south of the Tianshan Range previously divided into tribes and engaged in tribal conflicts, now they had in common both a shared Qing order and a concrete sense of territorial boundaries. When there were grievances, they could direct their displeasure towards symbols of this foreign occupation; isolated rebellions against the Qing in one location frequently would spread elsewhere, creating a common cause that united formerly disparate peoples. The Muslim Rebellion

²⁹ See Metrozi Hëyt (1992), p. 2.

³⁰ See James Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads: A History of Xinjiang* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), p. 97.

³¹ See Metrozi Hëyt (1992), p. 422.

took this shared action a step further when the Kokandi Yaqub Beg (*Agū Bo* 阿古柏) took advantage of the chaos gripping the region to establish an independent emirate that would overtake nearly the whole of the Tarim Basin. For a brief period, the oasis peoples lived under a single banner with a government that was both Turkic and Islamic in nature. The gambit ultimately failed when the emirate was unable to withstand both Yaqub Beg's untimely death in 1877 and the advance of Zuo Zongtang's armies. Nonetheless, it contributed to a perception of shared identity throughout the Tarim Basin, and that was an idea that provincehood could not so easily quell.

Arab geographers were the first to use the phrase “Eastern Turkistan” (*Tarkistān al-Sharqīyah*) in reference to the Tarim Basin during the ninth and tenth centuries, although that designation was not adopted elsewhere at the time.³² Nineteenth century Russia would pick up the mantle when, in a mission report written to the tsar in 1805, E.F. Timkovsky described Central Asian lands – not to exclude the Tarim Basin – collectively as “Turkistan.” Noting significant differences between territories west of the Pamirs versus east, he distinguished “Western Turkistan” (*Zapadnyj Turkestan*) and “Eastern Turkistan” (*Vostochnyj Turkestan*).³³ In the ensuing decades, Russians referred to Western Turkistan as simply “Turkistan,” while differentiating the lands east of the Pamirs as “Chinese Turkistan” (*Kitajskij Turkestan*). Russian sinologist Nikita Bichurin in 1829, however, suggested that the region be referred to formally as “Eastern Turkistan,” stating that, “It would be better here to call Bukhara's Turkistan the Western one, and Chinese Turkistan the Eastern... The name

³² See Owen Lattimore, *Pivot of Asia: Sinkiang and the Inner Asian Frontiers of China and Russia* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1950) p. 125.

³³ See Li Sheng, ed., *Xinjiang of China: Its Past and Present* (Urumqi: Xinjiang People's Publishing House, 2005), p. 131.

‘Chinese Turkistan’ should be changed.”³⁴ After the Russian Empire later expanded into Central Asia, its new territorial acquisitions were lumped into “Turkistan,” a region that during the Soviet era would be subdivided into Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan. From the Russian perspective, that made the Turkic Muslim regions east of the Pamirs “Eastern Turkistan,” as Timkovsky and Bichurin had suggested. Regardless, the oasis dwellers themselves lacked this east-west perspective, and do not appear to have popularly adopted the term until well into the twentieth century, when terminology was needed to address a growing national consciousness.

The ethnonym “Uyghur” would be another nineteenth century Russian word that would find currency in twentieth century Xinjiang. Historically, the term found its origins in the Uyghur Empire, a Turkic kingdom that occupied the area of Turpan (*Tulufan* 吐鲁番) – located in Eastern Xinjiang – during the eighth and ninth centuries. Nineteenth century Russian ethnographers used it to distinguish the Turki speakers of Xinjiang from those in Russian Central Asia; in English, the convention at the time was to use the more generic “Turki.” Soviet nationalities policy subsequently adopted the nineteenth century designation of Uyghurs as Turki speakers whose family lineages originated in the Tarim Basin, and from this, Xinjiang governments under Republican Governor Sheng Shicai 盛世才 and later in the People’s Republic would follow suit.³⁵ By the 1930s, the Soviet terminologies also caught on with local nationalists in Xinjiang. In November of 1933, on the eve of the founding of the first, short-lived Eastern Turkistan Republic in Kashgar, its government gathered to discuss details, including nomenclature. Initially, the name was to be the

³⁴ See Ablet Kamalov, “The Uyghurs as a Part of a Central Asian Community,” in *Situating Uyghurs between China and Central Asia*, edited by Ildikó Bellér-Hann, M. Cristina Cesàro, Rachel Harris, and Joanne Smith Finley (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007) 33-34.

³⁵ See Linda Benson, *The Ili Rebellion: The Muslim Challenge to Chinese Authority in Xinjiang 1944-1949* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1990), p. 29.

“Republic of Uyghurstan,” and that name even appeared on prematurely minted copper coins. There is, however, an important distinction to be made between Eastern Turki and Uyghur identities: one is broad, while the other is narrow. Eastern Turkistan could refer to the geographic whole of the Tarim Basin, or even be extended to include all of Xinjiang. Uyghur, however, refers exclusively to the sedentary Turkic oasis dwellers of the Tarim Basin. In its choice to use the word “Eastern Turkistan,” the government was demonstrating that it had an interest in ensuring that it represented all Turkic peoples – not just one subset – who were living within its domain.³⁶ This semantic decision would be revisited time and again, not only with the second Eastern Turkistan Republic one decade later, but also beyond that, including with the Eastern Turkistan People’s Revolutionary Party.

In the view of the People’s Republic of China, usage of “Eastern Turki” or “Eastern Turkistan” outside of scare quotes is decidedly not politically correct. Yet in the current study, there is an appropriate context for each. When speaking about an individual, I may introduce a person by his or her nationality, or *minzu* 民族, designation, as recognized within the People’s Republic of China. An organization such as the People’s Revolutionary Party, on the other hand, consisted of many different members. Some were Uyghurs, while others were formally Uzbeks, Kazakhs, or Tatars. In the end, XIP was an Eastern Turki organization, as its name suggests, and referring to it as “Uyghur” would make little sense. The Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region is the name of the political unit that exists in China, encompassing the Tarim and Zungharian Basins. Eastern Turkistan, on the other hand, is the name of a theoretical homeland encompassing the Tarim and Zungharian

³⁶ Abduqadir Haji, “1933-yildin 1937-yilgiche qeshqer, xoten, aqsularda bolup ötken weqeler” (Incidents in Kashgar, Hoten, and Aqsu, 1933-1937), *Shinjang tarix matëriyallari* (Xinjiang Historical Materials), No. 17 (Urumqi: Shinjang xelq neshriyati, 1986), pp. 60-62. See also Millward (2007), p. 203.

Basins, independent of China. To state that Eastern Turkistan activists fight for an “independent Xinjiang” also makes little sense.

Language Matters

Aside from English, I have used three primary research languages in the course of the present study: Chinese, Uyghur, and Russian. In general, I transcribe Chinese names using *pinyin* and provide characters for reference. I follow convention, however, and use non-*pinyin* transcriptions to refer to Chiang Kai-shek (*Jiang Jieshi* 蒋介石), Sun Yat-sen (*Sun Zhongshan* 孙中山), and the Kuomintang (*Guomindang* 国民党). For Russian, I defer to scholarly transliteration of Cyrillic. My favored transcription for Uyghur is the Uyghur Latin Script (*uyghur latin yëziqi*, or ULY).

The Uyghur Latin Script must not be confused with the earlier Mao-era Romanization system, the Uyghur New Script (*uyghur yëngi yëziqi*, or UYY). In the early years after the founding of the People’s Republic, language reformers in Xinjiang initially sought to abandon Uyghur’s Arabic-based Old Script (*kona yëziq*) in favor of the Uyghur Cyrillic Alphabet (*Uyghur siril yëziqi*), which had already been in use among Uyghurs in the Soviet Union since 1937. When Sino-Soviet relations deteriorated, however, they abandoned that project and in 1959 introduced the Latin-based Uyghur New Script. For more than two decades, local officials promoted the New Script as the official writing system for the Uyghur language within the People’s Republic of China. While some books, magazines, and pamphlets were published in the script, however, evidence indicates that it was in practice never widely adopted. In propaganda photos from the Chinese-language *Xinjiang Daily* during the Cultural Revolution, for example, zealously patriotic Uyghurs pose in front of propaganda slogans written in the Old Script. Until October 1, 1975, the newspaper title

itself was printed in Chinese characters, *pinyin*, and Old Script Uyghur. It was only on this date that the newspaper displayed the New Script in the place of the Old, and within a decade, editors at the *Xinjiang Daily* would revert once again to the Old Script.

For many of its more unusual characters, using the New Script on a contemporary computer would require a dedicated keyboard. Given its unpopularity as a replacement for the Old Script, however, there is little incentive for computer users to go to that effort. Thus tech-savvy twenty-first century language reformers sought a new and more accessible method to Romanize Uyghur using a standard keyboard layout. With this, the Uyghur Latin Alphabet was developed, not as a replacement for the Old Script, but rather as a convenient Latin-based input method for a digital age. It improves upon the New Script in several important ways. In the New Script, the vowel sounds [æ] and [ø] are represented with the uncommon letters *ə* and *ø*, respectively. In the Latin Script, they are represented as *e* and *ö*. The vowel sound [e], meanwhile, is differentiated from [æ] in the Latin Script through the addition of an accent or an umlaut, so that the letter is written as *é* or *ë*. The Uyghur New Script contains three letters that are exclusive to that writing system, *k* for [q], *z* for [ʒ], and *h* for [h]. The Latin Script writes these consonant sounds as *q*, *zh*, and *h*. The consonant [χ], written in the New Script as *h*, is *x* in the Latin Script. The pronunciations of the letters *q* and *x* in the New Script are derived from *pinyin* as [tʃ] and [ʃ], but in the Latin Script, these sounds are represented as *ch* and *sh*. Finally, the consonant sound [ʁ], which is represented in the New Script with the uncommon letter *q*, is written in the Latin Script as *gh*.

The Uyghur and Chinese versions of names and locations are frequently at odds. Many places in Xinjiang have two entirely different names, depending on the language of the speaker. For example, *Qaghiliq* in Uyghur is *Yecheng* 叶城 in Chinese. *Shache* 沙车 in Chinese is *Yeken* in Uyghur (and Yarkant in English). *Gbulja* in Uyghur is *Yining* 伊宁 in Chinese. In

the course of research, I have frequently encountered the names of places in either Uyghur or Chinese that have been difficult to translate into the other language. When reading Uyghur-language memoirs, in particular, it can be frustrating to read about a place but be unable to put it into context by finding it on a map. *Google Maps* lists place names by Chinese rather than Uyghur names. Fortunately, Dr. Yalqun Tash at the National Center for Scientific Research in Paris offers assistance on this matter through his *Makan Map* website, which allows the user to explore a searchable map of Xinjiang using Uyghur, Chinese, French, and English.³⁷ In this book, I will refer to places by their native names, but will offer the *pinyin* and characters for their Chinese name in parenthesis.

Uyghur personal names can be trickier still. Even between Uyghur sources, names may vary slightly. Longer or hard-to-pronounce names are often truncated. For example, Muhemmet'imin can be pronounced and written as Memtimin. Abdulhimit can be shortened to Ablimit. Ablikim is short for Abdulhekim. Additionally, voiced fricatives are occasionally pronounced as unvoiced fricatives and vice versa. The letters *w* and *f*, *p* and *b*, *p* and *f*, and *t* and *d* are sometimes interchanged. Thus, spelling is not always uniform, particularly with proper nouns that do not appear in the dictionary. Identifying Uyghur names from Chinese can be daunting. While these are in general more direct transliterations than place names, it can be difficult to discern what they are transliterations from. Moreover, because the names tend to be long and cumbersome in Chinese, Chinese sources frequently will refer to an individual by only part of his or her name. In Chinese sources, Muhemmet'imin Iminof is not *Maimaitiyimin Yiminnuofu* 买买提伊敏·伊敏诺夫, but is simply *Yiminnuofu* 伊敏诺夫. Seypidin Ezizi is not *Saifuding Aizexi* 赛福鼎·艾则孜, but

³⁷ See Yalqun Tash, *Makan Map* (<http://makanmap-prodig.cnrs.fr/>) (Accessed 5 December 2014).

rather *Saifuding* 赛福鼎. While these particular shortened names are relatively straightforward, others can be more challenging. Isa Yusuf Alptekin, a prominent Uyghur dissident who, from the diaspora, lobbied for Uyghur political and human rights during the Mao era, is referred to in the sources as *Aisha* 艾沙. Sometimes a *Google* search can clarify who is the referent for names like this, but as of writing, the top search result for *Aisha* 艾沙 is the character Elsa from the Disney movie *Frozen*. When *Google* fails, a cross-reference between different translations of the same book can help. For this reason, it is fortuitous that I inadvertently purchased multiple copies of Li Sheng's *Xinjiang of China: Its Past and Present*. Once again, as with locations, I use the native names for individuals, but when known I will also provide a person's Chinese name.

A Road Map

The following six chapters tell the story of the Eastern Turkistan People's Revolutionary Party, and of the domestic and international circumstances that surrounded its rise and fall. In chapter two, we start with a brief history of Eastern Turkistan prior to liberation, focusing on early twentieth century Xinjiang, the first and second Eastern Turkistan republics, and the first Eastern Turkistan People's Revolutionary Party. Next, we look at Eastern Turkistan-related and other resistance movements that were active in Xinjiang from liberation in 1949 to the start of the Cultural Revolution in 1966. This includes a section on the origins of the XIP of the Cultural Revolution era. Chapter four describes the Cultural Revolution as it unfolded in Xinjiang, creating the conditions by which a reinvigorated People's Revolutionary Party perceived an window to act. In chapter five, we see how the party used a chaotic domestic and international environment to build its strength and swell its ranks. Chapter six provides an overview of its peak and preparations

for an uprising, but also of the opportunity that it lost as external factors stabilized. This concludes with an account of the fateful final battle in Karajul. We then conclude with a discussion of the partisans' fate, as well as lingering questions regarding its similarities with the Inner Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party and whether or not Seypidin Ezizi too had a connection to the organization.

TWO

The village of Karajul is located at a distance of roughly 140 kilometers northeast of Kashgar, within the county-level city of Atush in Xinjiang's Kizilsu Kyrgyz Autonomous Prefecture. Situated in the Pamir Mountains a mere fifty kilometers from the border with Kyrgyzstan, the majority of Karajul's sixteen thousand residents belong to the prefecture's titular Kyrgyz *minzu*. In fact, the relative population and concentration of Kyrgyz within Karajul's borders earns it a distinction both prefecturally and nationally as a center of Kyrgyz *minzu* culture.³⁸ A sleepy and remote town today, in the late summer of 1969, Karajul was the site of the decisive battle that ended any reasonable chance that the Eastern Turkistan People's Revolutionary Party might ever succeed in its bid to establish an independent republic within Xinjiang's borders. One PRC source records the incident thus:

On August 20 [1969], the southern office of the "Eastern Turkistan People's Revolutionary Party" received a directive from the so-called "center." That evening, under the leadership of Axunop, it carried out meticulous plans to compel some yokels to carry large quantities of weapons and ammunition in two vehicles from Kashgar and Mekit [*maigaiti* 麦盖提] County, respectively, to make an attempt to approach the Soviet Union and request Soviet support to establish a counterrevolutionary base and declare independence. The next day, they reached the vicinity of Sughunchaza [*sugong kazi* 苏拱卡子] in Atush and were surrounded, annihilated, and pacified by our People's Armed Forces who had heard about the plot and rushed to the scene. [The rebels] paid the price, and this long-premeditated, carefully planned armed counterrevolutionary riot was crushed.³⁹

³⁸ See Kizilsu Kyrgyz Autonomous Prefecture People's Government, "Atushi shi xingzheng quhua he jumin dimingcheng" 阿图什市行政区划和居民地名称 (Atush City Administrative Divisions and Residential Place Names) (14 August 2014), *Kezilesu ke'erkezi zizhizhou renmin zhengfu* 克孜勒苏柯尔克孜自治州, http://www.xjkz.gov.cn/56c4914f-9565-4ba3-b204-2b2cb2e1b23d_1.html (accessed 31 December 2015).

³⁹ See Abdukërim Xaliq, *Qeshqer chong ishlar xatirisi* (Records of Major Events in Kashgar) (Qeshqer: Qeshqer uyghur neshriyati, 2010) p. 282.

The battle in Karajul was a crushing blow, not only to the partisans on the scene, but also to the very idea that there could ever be an independent Eastern Turkistan. With this defeat, accompanied with a spectacular string of arrests and imprisonments in connection to the case throughout the region, the cause become something of a chimera. That was not always a foregone conclusion, however. On more than one occasion, those who clamored for separation from China had very nearly made that dream into a reality. Twice before, they had succeeded in establishing republican governments claiming Xinjiang as their territory. Both times, they were later swallowed up in the political realities of their respective eras. Nonetheless, there was precedence to a bid that was further bolstered by both domestic chaos and a perceived Soviet alliance.

The First Eastern Turkistan Republic

Following the collapse of the Qing Empire in 1912, China was confronted with a national identity crisis. Early republican leaders claimed the whole of former Manchu lands as Chinese territory, yet it was not long before Tibet and Mongolia unilaterally decided to sever ties. The Xinhai Revolution had been successful in large part because elements of the Qing military shifted their allegiances from the crown towards the rebel cause at a crucial moment. Now holding the reins of power, these revolutionary allies were reluctant to relinquish their claims. Sun Yat-sen, spiritual leader of the republican movement and provisional post-revolutionary president, would be ousted and ultimately driven into exile by the militarist Yuan Shikai 袁世凯, who served as China's first full-term president and attempted, unsuccessfully, to restore a monarchic system with himself as emperor. This atmosphere invited autocratic warlords nationwide to seize power over various locales, rendering untenable Sun's democratic aspirations.

Xinjiang's first republican governor was Yang Zengxin 杨增新, a bureaucrat from Yunnan who had been working as a circuit judge in Xinjiang at the time of the revolution. Yang's regime was both paranoid and brutal in nature. He ordered closed many of the region's schools and limited the availability of news from the outside. Mail and telegram services were strictly monitored and censored, and transportation links to China's interior were intentionally left undeveloped. All of this left the region largely isolated. Meanwhile, secret police disarmed and eliminated potential rivals through closed courts, underground prisons, and extrajudicial assassinations. Still, unlike many warlords, Yang was more scholar than strongman. He did not have a military background, but was rather learned in the classics; this was a fact that became manifest through the details of his leadership. The *Book of the Later Han* (*hou han shu* 后汉书) records that in the first century, Han Protector General Ban Chao 班超 of the Western Regions invited rivals to a banquet, only to have them brutally executed at the shared table.⁴⁰ No doubt aware of this history, Yang Zengxin staged a similar scene when he ordered the beheadings of political opponents at feast he hosted in honor of the Chinese New Year in 1916.⁴¹ In yet another first century precedent, Yang followed the example of General Deng Yu 邓禹, whom the *Book of the Later Han* reports “used the barbarians to control the barbarians” (*yi yi fa yi* 以夷伐夷).⁴² On this front, Xinjiang's governor enlisted the services of Hui – that is, Chinese-speaking⁴³ Muslim –

⁴⁰ See Fan Ye 范晔, “Juan sishiqi: Ban liang liezhuan di sanshiqi” 卷四十七: 班梁列传第三十七 (Volume 47: Ban and Liang, Historical Biographies Number 37), *Hou han shu* 后汉书 (Book of the later Han), http://www.guoxue.com/shibu/24shi/hhansu/hhsu_052.htm (Accessed 20 April 2015).

⁴¹ See Aitchison K. Wu, *Turkistan Tumult* (London: Methuen & Co., 1940), pp. 42-44.

⁴² See Fan Ye 范晔, “Juan shiliu: Deng kou liezhuan di liu” 卷四十六: 邓寇列传第刘 (Volume 16: Deng and Kou, Historical Biographies Number 6), *Hou han shu* 后汉书 (Book of the Later Han), http://www.guoxue.com/shibu/24shi/hhansu/hhsu_018.htm (Accessed 18 April 2015).

⁴³ The Hui at Yang Zengxin's employ were Chinese speakers. However, by contemporary classification standards, Hui identity is more complicated than I indicate here. Nine of China's ten historically Muslim *minzu* can be defined by their respective languages – most of which are Turkic derivatives – or ancestral lands. Those

warlords from Ningxia and Gansu. Pitting one “barbarian” group against another proved highly effective in maintaining control of the province. The brutality with which his Hui surrogates executed justice against their Turkic counterparts, however, provided a backdrop against which a Turki nationalism solidified.

After seventeen years in power, Yang Zengxin himself fell victim to violence during a failed coup attempt at a banquet in 1928, leading to the rise of his subordinate Jin Shuren 金树仁. Jin lacked the political finesse of his predecessor. He continued Yang’s obscurantist and isolationist policies, but also began replacing Hui and other indigenous leadership with Han bureaucrats from China’s Interior.⁴⁴ These moves proved destabilizing, and further alienated Xinjiang’s Turkic residents from their provincial government. At the same time, the region’s continued forced isolation from the Central States, intended to bolster provincial authority, was having the unintended effect of drawing it closer to the Soviet Union. At a time when roads heading east were largely undeveloped, there were vibrant trade corridors to the west, particularly into Kazakhstan from Zungharia’s Ili River Valley. Both Yang and Jin were cognizant of the inherent dangers of the closeness of such liaisons. During the Muslim Rebellion of the nineteenth century, while Yaqub Beg maintained an emirate that encompassed the whole of the Tarim Basin, the Russian Empire took advantage of the situation to invade the Ili River Valley. After Zuo Zongtang wrested control of the south from the rebels, the Russians remained stubborn in their occupation of the north, and only relinquished control after considerable negotiations. At the time, the issue was resolved through the signing of an “unequal treaty,” one of many such nineteenth

Muslims who do not fit into these linguistically or territorially defined groups can be referred to as Hui. Many are speakers of Chinese, but some too are speakers of other languages such as Tibetan. See Jonathan Lipman, *Familiar Strangers: A History of Muslims in Northwest China* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997), p. xxiii.

⁴⁴ See Millward (2007), pp. 189-190.

century agreements through which foreign powers made unreasonable demands of a Qing Empire that they perceived was in the decline. Now half a century later, the actors were different – the Soviet Union had replaced Tsarist Russia, and the Republic of China the Qing – but suspicions remained regarding Soviet designs on Xinjiang. In an intelligence report written to the British Indian Affairs Office during the later years of Yang Zengxin’s rule, C.P. Skrine noted with alarm that “Not only in Ili, but also to a less extent in the south, the Soviet Government is doing what it can by means of an insidious propaganda to awaken the race- and class-consciousness of the Muhammadan population. Chinese policy is directed towards the prevention of this awakening.”⁴⁵

The construction of the *Turksib* – that is, the Turkistan-Siberian Railway – further drew the Soviet Union closer to Xinjiang during Jin’s governorship. Included as a part of the First Five Year Plan, it runs nearly 2400 kilometers from Tashkent to Novosibirsk in Western Siberia, including four hundred kilometers along the Xinjiang border.⁴⁶ The threat posed by this rail line was not only imagined. Upon completion, it facilitated rapid commercial and military transport directly onto Xinjiang’s borders. Those most involved in the planning and execution of the project openly confirmed that its intent was to increase Soviet influence in Xinjiang. Artemij Xalatov of the People’s Railway Commissariat (*narodnyj komissariat lutej soobščenija*) was direct in describing the purpose of the project as to “prevent the penetration of Western European capitalism into Sinkiang.”⁴⁷ Even more bluntly, chief

⁴⁵ Quoted in Andrew D. W. Forbes, *Warlords and Muslims in Chinese Central Asia: A Political History of Republican Sinkiang 1911-1949* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 130.

⁴⁶ See Matthew J. Payne, *Stalin’s Railroad: Turksib and the Building of Socialism* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2001), pp. 1-38.

⁴⁷ See Artemij Xalatov, *O Turkistano-Sibirskoj (Semirečenskoj) železnoj dogore* (About the Turkistan-Siberia Railway) (Leningrad: Raboče izdatel’stvo “priboj,” 1927) pp. 29-31. Quoted in Forbes, p. 41.

architect Vladimir Shatov stated, “Western China is in the [rail] road’s hinterland, and our goal is to conquer this market for Soviet goods.”⁴⁸

Soviet machinations notwithstanding, however, it was the misbehavior of one of Jin’s Han bureaucratic appointees that thrust Xinjiang into chaos in early 1931, creating an atmosphere that would culminate two years later with the founding of the first Eastern Turkistan Republic. The rumor was that in eastern Xinjiang’s Aratürük (*Yimu* 伊吾) County, a tax collector – a Jin appointee and, allegedly, a personal relative – forced the parents of a Muslim Uyghur girl, at gunpoint, to give their daughter to him in marriage. In response to this outrage, a string of anti-Chinese rebellions erupted, quickly overtaking the city of Qumul (*Hami* 哈密).⁴⁹ Jin Shuren dispatched provincial troops to the scene in order to pacify the situation. The bulk of the rebels, however, out-armed and outmanned, fled to the mountains from where they initiated a guerilla campaign. Meanwhile, Jin’s armies began to exact brutal vengeance against ordinary citizens in Qumul, a provocation that led the uprising to further metastasize. By the summer, rebels had enlisted the assistance of Hui warlord Ma Zhongying 马仲英, and the balance of power shifted in their favor.⁵⁰ To this, the governor turned to the untapped power of White Russians – naturalized refugees from the Bolshevik Revolution living primarily in the Ili River Valley – to bolster his provincial forces. The addition of these allies, however, provided the governor only temporary reprieve, and primarily against a protracted bombardment of the provincial capital in Dihua

⁴⁸ See Payne, pp. 307-308.

⁴⁹ See Supaxun Suwurow, “Qumul dıxanlar qozghulingi we ma jungying toghrisida eslimilirim” (My Memories of Ma Zhongying and the Hami Uprising), *Shinjang tarix matiriyalliri* (Xinjiang Historical Materials) No. 13 (Urumqi: Shinjang xelq neshriyati, 1984) pp. 167-168.

⁵⁰ See Supaxun Suwurow (1984), p. 173. See also Metrozi Hëyt (1992), pp. 487-488.

迪化 (the city's name would be changed to *Urumqi* after 1949).⁵¹ His control of the Tarim Basin was quickly crumbling. A separatist Islamic Kingdom of Hoten (*Xoten*, or *Hetian* 和田) was founded in late 1932. From the city that was its namesake, the kingdom stretched in both directions across much of the southern rim of the Tarim Basin, buttressed by support from mountain Kyrgyz tribes. In the north, meanwhile, an alliance of Hui and Turki rebels moved westward, spreading their uprising to oasis after oasis.⁵²

The Islamic Kingdom and the rebel forces converged in Kashgar. In that southwestern oasis, the respective agendas of each party came to the fore. The more insular Turkis of the southern rim appear to have been committed to the formation of an Islamic republic. Relatively more cosmopolitan Turkis from the north, accustomed as they were to direct trade and interaction with the Soviet Union, were more interested in secular concerns. Ma Zhongying's Hui armies, meanwhile, double-crossed their Turki allies and banded with Kashgar's Chinese administration, headed by fellow Hui warlord Ma Shaowu 马绍武. As the Turki parties negotiated the formation of an Eastern Turkistan Republic, the Hui awaited reinforcements from the safety of Kashgar's walled New City (*Qeshqer yängisheher*, or *Shulexian* 疏勒县). Ultimately, the government that negotiators agreed upon consisted of equal parts secularist and Islamist elements, a result that led Hoten's self-professed King Muhemmed Imin Bughra (*Muhanmode Yimin* 穆罕默德·伊敏) to disavow the body and return home to rule his Islamic Kingdom separately. Qumul rebel leader Khoja Niyaz Haji (*Hejia Niyazi Aji* 和加·尼牙孜·阿吉), who at the time was not even in Kashgar, was named president in

⁵¹ See Ge Fengjiao 葛丰交, Qiman Najimiding 奇曼·乃吉米丁, and Teng Chunhua 滕春华, *Eluosizu jianshi* 俄罗斯族简史 (A Brief History of the Russian Minzu) (Beijing: Minzu chubanshe, 2008), pp. 19-22.

⁵² See Millward (2007), p. 197. See also Abduqadir Haji (1986), pp. 28-43.

absentia; when he later arrived in Kashgar, he too was lukewarm to the fledgling state.⁵³

“Neither the Hoten government nor Khoja Niyaz Haji,” later wrote a still-bitter Bughra, “recognized this government.”⁵⁴ Thus the Eastern Turkistan Republic claimed sovereignty over the whole of the Tarim Basin, but in reality never really had any control over more than just the parts of Kashgar that were not occupied by the Hui. It moreover had a president who would side with the Chinese when reinforcements did arrive.

The Soviet Union witnessed these developments with deep apprehension. Turkic guerillas in Central Asia had, since the start of the First World War, been waging a protracted campaign of resistance against the Russians, provoked when the Tsarist government implemented a military draft. Now nearly two decades later, the Soviets were on the brink of restoring order to the region, but the disturbances in Xinjiang threatened to reinvigorate a flagging movement.⁵⁵ Also concerning was the prospect that the revolutionaries could be in league with the Japanese, who had only recently invaded Manchuria and sponsored the formation of the puppet state of Manchukuo, demonstrating a willingness to interfere in the internal affairs of established regional powers. The Soviet Union demonstrated its solidarity with Xinjiang’s provincial government in early 1933, when it repatriated some two thousand troops from the “Northeastern Anti-Japanese Volunteer Army” (*dongbei kangri yiyongjun* 东北抗日义勇军), a resistance group that consisted of Manchurian refugees, to supplement the White Russian and provincial troops defending Dihua. After a months-long siege of the capital, Jin Shuren was toppled in a coup in April of that year.⁵⁶ He was replaced with

⁵³ See Muhemmed Imin Bughra, *Sherqiy türkistan tarixi (başırqı zaman uyghurche nesbri)* (A History of Eastern Turkistan [1940] [Modern Uyghur Edition]) (Ankara, 2000), p. 426. See also Millward (2007), p. 203.

⁵⁴ See Muhemmed Imin Bughra (2000), p. 426.

⁵⁵ See William S. Ritter, “The Final Phase in the Liquidation of Anti-Soviet Resistance in Tadzhikistan: Ibrahim Bek and the Basmachi, 1924-1931,” *Soviet Studies*, Vol. 37, No. 4 (October 1985), pp. 484-493.

⁵⁶ See Li Ping 李平, “Dongbei kangri yiyongjun zai xinjiang” 东北抗日义勇军在新疆 (The Northeastern Anti-Japanese Volunteer Army in Xinjiang), *Xinjiang zhexue shehui kexue wang* 新疆哲学社会科学网 (Xinjiang

Sheng Shicai, who had since 1931 headed “bandit suppression” forces in the provincial military. An ethnic Manchu who had previously served the Manchurian warlord Zhang Zuolin 张作霖, Sheng was aggrieved at the Japanese provocations in his homeland and, by extension, feared that they were behind the events unfolding in Xinjiang. With these thoughts in consideration, he approached the Soviets for help.

By the time that the Eastern Turkistan Republic was formally announced on November 12, 1933, Sheng had already greeted two Red Army brigades into Zungharia. His provincial troops, moreover, now had access to military aircraft and chemical weapons. By February, the Eastern Turkistan Republic had fallen. President Khoja Niyaz Haji greeted provincial armies in Kashgar by handing over fellow government ministers, and as a reward, was granted the vice-chairmanship of Xinjiang’s government.⁵⁷ Unencumbered in Kashgar, Ma Zhongying and his Hui allies advanced on the Islamic Kingdom in Hoten, which they quickly subdued. There remained pockets of resistance – and the Huis that occupied the south would be reluctant to relinquish territory that they recovered – but Sheng Shicai, with Soviet assistance, had largely restored control of Xinjiang to the provincial government.⁵⁸

At the same time, that government was falling increasingly under the influence of the Soviet Union. After having contributed to the suppression of the rebel movement, the superpower next door expanded its footprint in Xinjiang, investing in the region’s economy, infrastructure, and security, all while demanding greater access to its strategic resources. Significant to the later development of the Eastern Turkistan People’s Revolutionary Party, moreover, an agreement between Sheng Shicai and Soviet leaders stipulated that three

Academy of Social Sciences Online) (25 February 2012) http://www.xjass.com/ls/content/2012-02/25/content_222298.htm (accessed 16 August 2015).

⁵⁷ See James Millward (2007), p. 199-200.

⁵⁸ See Sheng Shih-ts’ai, *Red Failure in Sinkiang*, edited by Allen S. Whiting, in *Sinkiang: Pawn or Pivot* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1958) pp. 151-208.

hundred promising young students from Xinjiang would be specially selected to study at Central Asia University, located in Tashkent, the capital of the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic. Every year from 1934 to 1936, a new class of one hundred students traveled abroad, fully funded by the Soviet government for two years of advanced study, taking courses on education, political economy, international law, government, mathematics, geometry, physics, chemistry, biology, history, and geography. The makeup of this student body, as per the details of the agreement, was to reflect Xinjiang's demographic and linguistic diversity. Forty percent of students were expected to be speakers of Uyghur, forty percent Chinese speakers (including Hui, Manchu, and Xibo), ten percent other Turkic language speakers (Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Uzbek, Tajik, Tatar), and ten percent speakers of Mongolian. In practice, nearly half (146) of the students were Uyghur, one-third (100) were Hans and Huis, just over ten percent (39) were speakers of other Turkic languages, and four percent (12) were Mongolian speakers.⁵⁹

Upon the completion of their studies, these intellectuals were referred to in Uyghur as the *Tashkentchis*, meaning “those who *did* Tashkent.” They accepted positions in the civil bureaucracy and in education and remained an important intellectual backbone in Xinjiang for years to come. Not surprisingly, the *Tashkentchis* also received training and indoctrination in Marxist thought. Prominent alumni included several future founding members of the Eastern Turkistan People's Revolutionary Party, including Seypidin Ezizi, Abdulla Zakirof (*Zabaluofu* 扎哈洛夫), and Seydulla Seypullayof (*Saijfulayefu* 赛甫拉也夫). However, other *Tashkentchis* were victims of the times. Shortly after the program at Central Asia University started, so too did Stalin's Great Purge (1936-1938).⁶⁰

⁵⁹ See Abduraxman Abdulla, *Tashkentchiler* [The Tashkentchis] (Urumqi: Shinjang xelq neshriyati, 2002), pp. 1-6.

⁶⁰ See Abduraxman Abdulla (2002), pp. 1-6.

Soviet leaders during the 1930s faced the very real threat of simultaneous wars on two fronts – against Germany to the west and Japan to the east. Under such circumstances, the emergence internally of a dissident “fifth column” would be a catastrophic development. This context partially explains Stalin’s reorganization of Soviet domestic intelligence services under the auspices of the infamous People’s Commissariat for Internal Affairs (*narodnyy komissariat vnutrennix del*, or NKVD). From 1936 to 1938, under the leadership of People’s Commissar Nikolai Yezhov, the NKVD carried out a massive purge that eliminated – through secret arrests, trials, imprisonments and/or executions – more than one million potential troublemakers within the Soviet Union. This campaign moreover was not contained to Soviet borders. In Xinjiang, Sheng Shicai rebuilt his already robust domestic surveillance operations on the model of the NKVD, rebranding his own as the Xinjiang Political Supervisory Bureau (*xinjiang sheng zhengzhi jiancha zong guanli ju* 新疆省政治监察总局). For two years, tens of thousands of people, including countless intellectuals, local officials, and religious figures from Xinjiang’s indigenous communities, were disappeared.⁶¹ In 1937, some thirty individuals at Central Asia University – nearly one-third of the students from the third class of *Tashkentchis* – were recalled early, discredited as the “children of traitors.”⁶² Xinjiang’s participation in the Great Purge – and Sheng’s subsequent membership to the Communist Party of the Soviet Union – became important evidence that the province was operating as a Soviet satellite.

The Second Eastern Turkistan Republic

⁶¹ See Wēn Pēyren (Wen Peiran), “Shing shiseyning ishpiyonluq konturolligidiki shingjang” (Sheng Shicai’s Xinjiang under Spy Control), *Shinjang tarix matēriyallari* (Xinjiang Historical Materials), No. 7 (Urumqi: Shinjang xelq neshriyati, 1983), pp. 1-4.

⁶² See Abduraxman Abdulla (2002), pp. 1-6.

According to his memoirs, Sheng only reluctantly pursued membership in the CPSU – and then only out of fear of a plot against his life. He was summoned to Moscow in the late summer of 1938, at the height of the Great Purge. It was during this trip that he made a realization regarding his own vulnerability to Stalin's whims. Others had been disappeared in precisely these circumstances, he thought; perhaps he would never make it out of the Soviet Union alive. Fearing the worst, he greeted the offer of party membership with relief. Nonetheless, his suspicion stayed with him upon his return to Xinjiang. On the one hand, he played the role of a good communist ally, broadly complying with Soviet demands and hiring Chinese Communists into the provincial administration. On the other, he claims to have been seeking a way out of his predicament, and believed that even his Chinese Communist associates were plotting against him.⁶³ Under these circumstances, Sheng reached a breaking point. In October of 1940, he resisted an attempt by Stalin's regime to force him into a disadvantageous deal that would have granted a fifty year lease on a tin mine in Zungharia. In response, Soviet negotiators issued oblique threats regarding the potential dire consequences of noncompliance.⁶⁴ The signing of a non-aggression pact in April of 1941 between the Soviet Union and Japan – who was at war with China and against whom his friendship with the Soviets was partially predicated – further aggravated an already deteriorating relationship.⁶⁵ The German attack on the Soviet Union in June demonstrated to Sheng that his estranged ally was not invulnerable and that his alignment with that state was no guarantee of Xinjiang's protection. Thus, despite the governor's later insistence that he was not merely abandoning an ally at a moment of weakness, it may have nonetheless been more than coincidence that, soon after, he changed his allegiances. In October of

⁶³ See Sheng (1958), pp. 199-208.

⁶⁴ See Sheng (1958), pp. 215-227.

⁶⁵ See Sheng (1958), p. 241.

1942, Sheng Shicai issued a demand to the Soviet consulate in Dihua, asking all but Soviet diplomatic personnel be withdrawn from the province. With this, Sheng ended Xinjiang's formal subordination to the Soviet Union.⁶⁶

Predictably, his would not be the final word on this matter. First of all, the governor's move completely crippled Xinjiang's economy. In light of physical distance, underdeveloped infrastructure, and war disruptions, lost trade revenue could not be replicated by turning to China's domestic sources. As vital goods became scarce, the flow of currency slowed. To address this, the province printed more currency, and inflation resulted.⁶⁷ The Stalinist economy had been imperfect, but this transition away left some feeling nostalgic. For Moscow, too, the disruption of access to Xinjiang's raw materials at this critical juncture was a problem. For its war efforts, it needed the gold, tin, manganese, tungsten, and uranium that the region had previously provided. Thus, less than a year after Sheng Shicai closed off trade relations, and one decade after the Soviet Union provided Xinjiang's provincial government with the logistical support it needed to squelch the first Eastern Turkistan Republic, now the Soviets clandestinely threw their weight behind the formation of a second. Still, the Soviet Union was not solely responsible for this development. Xinjiang's economy was in shambles. Its post-Qing leadership had been uniformly both foreign and authoritarian. It shared with China neither the bonds of a single language nor common history. Most importantly, the political activism of ten years before – and the nearly successful founding of an independent Eastern Turkistan Republic – remained fresh memories. For those who had been sold on the idea of a new state, ruled by

⁶⁶ See Sheng (1958), pp. 228-257.

⁶⁷ See Millward (2007), p. 213.

locals and unshackled from China, this remained an unfinished possibility. No foreign entity could be solely responsible for planting these separatist ambitions.

The Soviet Union did, nonetheless, play a key role in encouraging, supporting, and facilitating rebellion against Chinese rule. Kazakh banditry against Chinese settlers and Soviet mining operations in Zungharia during the 1930s led Sheng Shicai at the end of the decade to order a forced disarmament of Kazakhs. In response to this move, a low level rebel movement, headed by Osman Batur (*Wusiman* 乌斯满), simmered for years in the Altay Mountains along the Mongolian frontier. After Sheng Shicai discontinued Xinjiang's formal affiliation with the Soviet Union, troves of new weapons began flowing across the border from Mongolia, a Soviet ally. Therefore, just as residents were feeling the pain of a constricted economy, they gained access to new strength of arms.⁶⁸ By the fall of 1944, the whole of northeastern Zungharia had been wrested from provincial control, and unrest spread westward into the Ili River Valley. The rebels, moreover, gained access to modern military aircraft, which they used to bombard Chinese positions. Formidably well-trained and organized, they very quickly overwhelmed provincial forces. On November 12, 1944 – eleven years to the day after the founding of the first Eastern Turkistan Republic in Kashgar – Uzbek religious scholar Ėlixan Töre (*Ailhan Tulie* 艾力汗·吐烈) declared a new Eastern Turkistan Republic, this time centered in Ghulja. As an added Soviet message to Xinjiang's provincial government, the rebel military already had uniforms, the metal buttons of which were embossed with the Cyrillic *BTP* – in Roman letters, VTR, representing *Vostočno-Turkistsanskaja Respublika*, Russian for the Eastern Turkistan Republic.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ See Linda Benson and Ingvar Svanberg, *China's Last Nomads: The History and Culture of China's Kazaks* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1998), pp. 72-77.

⁶⁹ See Millward (2007), p. 216.

Contemporary Chinese scholarship on the first and second Eastern Turkistan republics tends to regard each with broad ideological strokes. The first was a retrogressive Islamic Republic, pan-Turkist and pan-Islamist in nature. The second – insofar as sources are even willing to acknowledge that it ever had a government harboring separatist intent – was proto-communist, a righteous placeholder for the ultimate arrival of the Chinese Communist Party into Xinjiang. Both of these views are oversimplistic. While Muhemmed Imin Bughra's Islamic Kingdom of Hoten did have representation in the former republic, neither Bughra personally nor his pretended kingdom recognized the Kashgar regime – specifically because they considered it too secular. In describing his own involvement with the earlier movement, future communist leader Seypidin Ezizi makes no mention of Islamist influence whatsoever and, moreover, refers to its official title as the “Independent Republic of Eastern Turkistan” (*sherqiy türkistan istiqlaliyet jumburiyiti*) rather than the “Islamic Republic,” as found in other sources.⁷⁰

In the case of the latter Eastern Turkistan Republic, it is clear that there was some Soviet influence, but it also is worth noting the words with which Ėlixan Töre declared its independence.

The Turkestan Islam Government is organized: praise be to Allah for his manifold blessings! Allah be praised! The aid of Allah has given us the heroism to overthrow the government of the oppressor Chinese. But even if we have set ourselves free, can it be pleasing in the sight of our God if we only stand and watch while you, our brethren in religion . . . still bear the bloody grievance of subjection to the black politics of the oppressor Government of the savage Chinese? Certainly our God would not be satisfied. We will not throw down our arms until we have made you free from the five bloody fingers of the Chinese oppressors' power, nor until the very roots of the Chinese oppressors' government have dried and died away

⁷⁰ See Seypidin Eziz, *Ömür dastani, eslime 1: zulüm zindanlirida* (The Story of My Life, Memoir 1: In the Jail of Oppression) (Beijing: Milletler neshriyati, 1990), pp. 298-322.

from the face of the earth of East Turkestan, which we have inherited as our native land from our fathers and our grandfathers.⁷¹

Early literature from the second republic, furthermore, demonstrates that early rebels were not necessarily fighting with the intent of securing Chinese Communist rule in Xinjiang.

We are fighting to do away with Chinese rule in all our East Turkestan [Sinkiang] and to destroy for all times the roots of Chinese tyranny in our territory. East Turkestan belongs to the real masters of the territory, the Uighurs, the Taranchis, the Kazaks, the Kirghiz, the Tatars, the Uzbeks, together with all those who live among them in peace and friendship and who alike suffer Chinese oppression, such as the Mongols and other non-Chinese nations. There is no place in East Turkestan for Chinese colonial government or Chinese colonists... [We] are fighting in the interests of the people of all races except the Chinese so that in the future the district, town, village and small village administrations and organizations will be composed of trusted, energetic, capable, just members elected according to the popular will by the locally resident people themselves.⁷²

Thus, while there were undoubtedly Islamist elements in the former republic and Soviet influences in the latter, there was also an ideological diversity in both that is sometimes not reflected in the literature of each respective movement. Additionally, while there were some elements in the second Eastern Turkistan Republic who favored future unification with a more magnanimous Chinese government, this was clearly not a unanimous objective for the rebels.

Although historians often periodize the second republic to the dates 1944 to 1949, this can be misleading absent of context. It did not function as an independent state for the duration of that five year term. Rather, there were three distinct stages during which the rebel regime operated, each with varying levels of both effective and intended autonomy.

⁷¹ Cited in Benson (1990), pp. 45-46.

⁷² See Benson (1990), pp. 200-206.

During its first ten months, in pursuance of the stated desire to eject the Chinese from the region, its military engaged in direct conflict against China's National Army. Ever since the end of Sheng's alliance with the Soviets, Xinjiang had witnessed an influx of troops under Chiang Kai-shek's direct control. Despite an ever growing presence, however, the Chinese armies were beleaguered and wary from the war in the east, and were unable to pose a credible resistance to the spread of the Soviet-backed insurrection. By August of 1945, the Ghulja government controlled much of the Altay (*Aletai* 阿勒泰), Tarbagatai (*Tacheng* 塔城), and Ili (*Yili* 伊犁) Districts, covering a total land area of 268,000 square kilometers, roughly analogous in size to the state of Colorado. The fledgling republic was centered in the northern, mountainous regions of Zungharia (not so coincidentally, also where Soviet mining interests were centered), but conflicts were erupting in nearly every corner of Xinjiang. The Tarim Basin city of Aqsu (*Akesu* 阿克苏) had fallen to the rebels, as had the southern Pamir outpost of Tashkorgan (*Tashikun'ergan* 塔什库尔干). Momentum was on the side of the rebels as the provincial capital in Dihua was increasingly within reach.⁷³

Thus began the second stage of the rebellion. Despite its early success and rapid expansion, there were circumstances beyond the control of its participants that would fundamentally alter its shape and objectives. The chaos of the Second World War, coupled with Soviet patronage and a disdain for Chinese rule provided fertile grounds for the initial founding of the regime. For as long as these conditions persisted, moreover, the second Eastern Turkistan Republic was successful in that its economy flourished, its government was competent, and its military was strong. In August of 1945, however, the situation changed. Signed in April of 1941, the Soviet-Japanese Neutrality Pact had stipulated a five

⁷³ See Millward (2007), pp. 216-217.

year term during which the Soviets would not interfere in Japanese interests.⁷⁴ This allowed them to focus singularly on their fight in the Western theater against the Nazi assault on their territory. It also meant, however, that they remained neutral in the Japanese war on China. Still, at the Tehran Conference of 1943, Stalin assured Allied forces that the Soviet Union would join the war in the Pacific after Germany was defeated. Two years later in Yalta, he further specified that Soviet entry would come within three months of the German surrender. Thus, on August 9, three months after Victory in Europe Day, the Soviet Union belatedly violated its neutrality pact and joined the war against Japan.⁷⁵

With the subsequent signing of a Treaty of Friendship and Alliance between the Soviets and Chiang Kai-shek's government, the Soviet ambassador approached Xinjiang's newly appointed governor Zhang Zhizhong 张治中 – Chiang Kai-shek had ordered Sheng Shicai's removal in late 1944 – and presented the following note:

A group of Muslims claiming to be representatives of the rebels have issued a statement to our consulate [in Ghulja]. Acting as liaisons before the Russians, they secretly expressed their desire to cooperate by entering the fighting happening in China. Moreover, they revealed that it was never the intent of the rebels to separate from China, but their goal rather was to realize autonomy in the parts of Xinjiang where Muslims constitute a majority, such as in Ghulja, Tarbagatai, Altai, and Kashgar. The aforementioned representatives also described the various acts of oppression that have been carried out under provincial authority. The Soviet government values peace and order in its territories adjacent to Xinjiang. If the Chinese government approves, we would like to appoint our consul in Ghulja to end the situation in Xinjiang and to provide whatever assistance possible.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ See "Pact of Neutrality between the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and Japan," 13 April 1941, <http://avalon.law.yale.edu/wwii/s1.asp> (Accessed 13 April 2015).

⁷⁵ See "Protocol of Proceedings of Crimea Conference," February 1945, <http://avalon.law.yale.edu/wwii/yalta.asp> (Accessed 13 April 2015).

⁷⁶ See Jang Jzhjung (Zhang Zhizhong 张治中), *Ürumchi söhbitidin shıjıng tıch azad bolghan'gha qeder* (From the Urumqi Dialogue to the Peaceful Liberation), *Shıjıng tarıx matëriyalları* (Xinjiang Historical Materials), No. 21 (Urumqi: Shıjıng xelq neshriyati, 1987), pp. 7-8.

Once again, factions within Xinjiang continued to hold their own agendas. It was not inaccurate for the Soviets to assert that the rebels never intended a total separation from China: while some may have desired absolute independence, others would be content simply with greater autonomy. This note, therefore, indicated a shift not in rebel sentiments, but rather to which factions the Soviets would lend their support. Ardent nationalists such as Ėlixan Töre were thereupon removed from positions of power, only to be replaced with more conciliatory activists.⁷⁷

A peace agreement on January 2, 1946 formalized a reconciliation between China and the rebels, paving the way for the formation of a new coalition government to be forged between the two parties. Coming on the heels of the imperious, self-serving rules of Yang Zengxin, Jin Shuren, and Sheng Shicai, the terms of this agreement were refreshingly liberal in regards to their recognition of the constitution and interests of Xinjiang's diverse communities. It established parameters for free and fair elections of both local officials and three-fifths the membership of the provincial assembly. The freedoms of religion, the press, assembly, and speech were guaranteed. Local languages were granted official status in government and education, and local arts would be promoted. With this, the Eastern Turkistan Republic ceased in large part to function autonomously, and rather was folded into the provincial administration. Regardless, the transition was not absolute. There remained an Eastern Turkistan shadow government. As per a supplement to the initial peace agreement, moreover, the Ghulja regime's National Army would remain a separate force

⁷⁷ According to witness Roostam Sadri, Soviet agents subsequently kidnapped and summarily "disappeared" Töre. See Roostam Sadri, "The Islamic Republic of Eastern Turkestan: A Commemorative Review," *Journal (Institute of Muslim Affairs)*, vol. 5, no. 2 (July 1984), pp. 294-319. Cited in Millward (2007), p. 219.

from China's National Army, while the leadership of Chinese forces in Aqsu and Kashgar would be given to military leaders from among the local peoples.⁷⁸

A coalition government was established in July of 1946; within a year, that coalition would stumble. Zhang Zhizhong's experiment failed because neither diehards for Eastern Turkistan independence nor hardliners within the Chinese military were satisfied with the compromise position. Even as some from the Ghulja regime participated in the provincial government, anti-China and pro-Soviet propaganda continued to emanate out of Ghulja, both within the three districts and into the Tarim Basin. General dissatisfaction with the terms of the agreement led to popular demonstrations in Dihua in February of 1947. That unrest served as a pretext for the military to enact martial law in the capital, restricting the freedoms that the peace agreement had guaranteed.⁷⁹ Elsewhere, Chinese hardliners sought to destabilize the provincial government by following the example set by the Soviets before. They clandestinely provided arms to Kazakh rebels under Osman Batur, who had withdrawn his support for the Ghulja regime after it signed the peace agreement.⁸⁰

In his memoirs, Zhang Zhizhong relates three primary reasons why, in the summer of 1947, he chose to resign from Xinjiang's governorship. "I am a Han," he writes, "and Hans are a minority in Xinjiang province. They scarcely constitute five percent of the population. Therefore, it is inappropriate for the governorship to be held by a Han. If a Han is appointed to the governorship, this is a tool of colonial governance."⁸¹ Second, he found himself increasingly alienated from the trajectory of politics at the center. By this point, China was engulfed in the civil war between Chiang Kai-shek's Kuomintang and the

⁷⁸ See Benson (1990), pp. 185-187.

⁷⁹ See Millward (2007), p. 222

⁸⁰ See Jang Jzhjung (Zhang Zhizhong 张治中), pp. 225-229.

⁸¹ See Jang Jzhjung (Zhang Zhizhong 张治中), p. 233.

Chinese Communist Party. Zhang advocated a peaceful reconciliation between sides, but from his post in Xinjiang, he was only able to contribute little.⁸² Finally, the governor complained that he often found himself at the center of multifarious interethnic and factional struggles, forced to choose sides when he rather preferred reconciliation.

Sometimes the radicals accused me of favoring the conservatives, while at other times the conservatives disparaged me for favoring the radicals. The stances of these two groups were... wholly incompatible. The conservatives stood for the homeland and upheld the Center. I supported this, but many in this faction opposed the Soviet Union. This was counter to my policies, and I did not approve of it. Because the radicals had an opposite view on this, I endorsed their view towards the Soviet Union. However, they lacked strong views on the homeland and domestic policy, and this did not suit my stance regarding the unity of the motherland. Therefore, I rejected this as well. At every gathering, members of these two factions would begin cursing one another. When the radicals cursed the conservatives as slaves to the Hans, the conservatives countered that the radicals were lackeys to foreigners. As these fights happened, they grew ever larger. From this formed the misguided idea that if one tended towards the Hans, they must oppose the Soviets, and if one tended towards the Soviets, they must oppose the Hans. However, my stance consisted of both maintaining the unity of the motherland and advancing friendly relations between China and the Soviet Union.⁸³

In the end, it was all too much for Zhang, an outsider who found difficulty relating to the views of the people he governed.

Having argued that Han leadership in the region could be likened to “colonial governance,” the outgoing governor was intent on selecting a non-Han to succeed his post. Initially, he considered Exmetjan Qasimi (*Abemaitijiang* 阿合买提江) and Burhan Shehidi (*Bao'erhan* 包尔汉), both vice chairmen in the coalition government. Exmetjan was young,

⁸² See Jang Jzhjung (Zhang Zhizhong 张治中), pp. 235-236.

⁸³ See Jang Jzhjung (Zhang Zhizhong 张治中), pp. 233-234.

charismatic, popular, and full of promise, but Zhang feared the young Uyghur leader's close relationship with the revolutionary movement's more radical factions. Burhan, on the hand, was a seasoned Tatar leader with moderate political leanings, a purported commitment to union with China, and a strong appeal especially among the intellectuals who were at the core of the revolutionary movement. However, having never met Chiang Kai-shek nor spent time in Nanjing, he was an unknown quantity to the Center in the Kuomintang.⁸⁴ Having ruled out both of these possibilities, Zhang turned to Xinjiang's Chief Prosecutor Mes'ut Sabri (*Maisiwude* 麦斯武德). Having spent more than ten years working with Chiang Kai-shek's government in the east, he was a well-respected, known entity to the Center of the Kuomintang in Nanjing. A Ghulja native, Mes'ut moreover had family and personal connections in the Ili region, the center of the revolutionary movement, and Zhang Zhizhong had heard no indication that the chief prosecutor faced strong opposition either from within the provincial government nor the rebel factions in the three districts. In a meeting with Chiang Kai-shek in early 1947, Zhang formally recommended that Mes'ut take up the governor's post. In the same meeting, moreover, he appointed Burhan Shehidi to go work with the Kuomintang in Nanjing in order to familiarize his protégé with the party center. Zhang saw great potential, and intended to cultivate the Tatar official for future advancement.⁸⁵

Mes'ut's appointment to high office in Xinjiang was a significant milestone in the history of Chinese governance in that region. For the first time since the establishment of the province, a Turki official held the highest reins of power. Yet this decision was unanticipatedly fraught. Xinjiang's government formally announced Mes'ut's appointment

⁸⁴ See Jang Jzhjung (Zhang Zhizhong 张治中), pp. 236-237.

⁸⁵ See Jang Jzhjung (Zhang Zhizhong 张治中), pp. 237-239.

on May 19, 1947; by May 20, detractors in Dihua and other cities were already publishing denunciatory tracts condemning the selection. Exmetjan Qasimi was so incensed that on May 21, he announced that he was returning to Ghulja to reconsider the coalition government and the direction of the Three Districts Revolution. Ili's representatives moreover declined to participate in Mes'ut's swearing-in ceremony on May 28.⁸⁶ The Uyghur governor's problem was quite the opposite of that posed by Burhan Shehidi. Burhan had little experience with the Nanjing government; Mes'ut, on the other hand, was perhaps too close with the central regime. Despite his ties to Ghulja, he had lived more than a decade outside of Xinjiang and was largely removed from the recent developments in the province. His intimate connections in Nanjing led to the impression that he was nothing more than a pawn, a figurehead. He also rejected Soviet subclassifications of Xinjiang's Turki majority into Uyghur, Tatar, Kyrgyz, and the like, a stance that drew the ire of both the radical factions and Soviet negotiators. He favored a model in which Xinjiang would be granted more autonomy, but remain a part of China. This was unacceptable for independence activists, while it antagonized the very same Kuomintang forces in Xinjiang who already considered Zhang Zhizhong's peace agreement to be too generous. Within months of Mes'ut's rise, the tenuous provincial coalition collapsed outright, and a reconstituted Eastern Turkistan Republic once again asserted its independence from Xinjiang province.⁸⁷

Thus began the third stage of the second Eastern Turkistan Republic, which lasted from the summer of 1947 to the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949. During this period, it operated independently from Xinjiang province, bolstered with Soviet

⁸⁶ See Jang Jzhjung (Zhang Zhizhong 张治中), pp. 239.

⁸⁷ See Millward (2007), p. 222.

support. For the first year, Zhang Zhizhong – now the commander of the Northwest Military Region and the only representative of the Chinese administration with whom rebels were willing to deal directly – continued negotiations with the Soviets and Eastern Turkis regarding forging a reconciliation. He maintained regular correspondence with Eastern Turkistan Chairman Exmetjan Qasimi through the summer of 1948, but was unable to reach a satisfactory compromise. The Ghulja regime complained that the Chinese had violated the peace agreement through abuses of power and by expanding their military presence, arming Osman Batur, denying weapons and materials for the Three Districts military, and using a police force that was almost entirely Han. In the end, a satisfactory resolution to the impasse would be met only by Mes'ut's removal, a fuller implementation of the terms of the peace agreement, and a loosening of the political controls that had been imposed on the province's Turki populations.⁸⁸

By the eve of the communist victory in the Chinese civil war, at a time when China's Kuomintang government was struggling to keep hold and Xinjiang's provincial government was faltering, the Eastern Turkistan Republic was a stable and functional political entity. Exmetjan Qasimi headed a government of competent, Soviet-trained administrators who oversaw a popular and relatively prosperous independent Eastern Turkistan. The provincial government, on the other hand, suffered under the weight of factionalism and the political pressures wrought by the impending collapse of Chiang Kai-shek's regime. Militarist factions in the Nationalist Army grew increasingly belligerent during Mes'ut Sabri's tenure as governor, and added increasing strains to the fraught relationship between the province and the rebels. Mes'ut's ultimate removal from power, leading to Burhan Shehidi's appointment as governor in January of 1949, did little to mitigate a tense situation in Xinjiang.

⁸⁸ See Jang Jzhjung (Zhang Zhizhong 张治中), pp. 257-268.

The Eastern Turkistan People's Revolutionary Party – a Crucible of Turki Communist Leadership

We can look at the second Eastern Turkistan Republic for the ideological precedents, if not the direct origins, of the Cultural Revolution-era Eastern Turkistan People's Revolutionary Party. The party's predecessor of the same name, founded clandestinely in late 1945 or early 1946, was the first predominantly Turki communist party to operate in Xinjiang.⁸⁹ Its existence was brief, but it cast a long shadow on the future of non-Han leadership in the region. Later Chinese Communist Party leaders such as Seypidin Ezizi, Muhemmet'imin Iminof, and Enwer Xanbaba (*Aniwa'er Hanbaba* 安尼瓦尔·汗巴巴) all gained political prominence through their partisan activism under the auspices of this first People's Revolutionary Party.

It is difficult to draw a direct line linking the former and latter incarnations of the party. In his memoirs, Enwer Xanbaba, a founding member of the original XIP, states unequivocally that the party ceased to exist in early 1947, when it merged with a rival organization, the predominantly-Han "Xinjiang Union of Communists" (*Shinjang kommunistichilar ittifaqi*/Chinese: *Xinjiang gongchanzhuizhe tongmeng* 新疆共产主义者同盟), to form the "People's Democratic Revolutionary Party" (*Xelqchil inqilabiy partiyisi*/Chinese: *Minzhu geming dang* 民主革命党) – which incidentally shares the same acronym XIP.⁹⁰ Fellow leader Seypidin Ezizi, on the other hand, suggests that, after the merger, the People's Revolutionary Party continued to exist and expand throughout Xinjiang under that name, possibly even until liberation in 1949.⁹¹ Neither Seypidin nor Xanbaba comment on the

⁸⁹ See Enwer Xanbaba (1999), p. 25.

⁹⁰ See Enwer Xanbaba (1999), pp. 32-33.

⁹¹ See Seypidin Ezizi (1990), pp. 117-118.

party of the same name that was operational in the 1960s. Opinions range regarding the extent to which the two parties were connected. One Uyghur nationalist source that I consulted suggests that the Eastern Turkistan People's Revolutionary Party never fully ceased its activities, and that it worked to subvert the Chinese communist regime throughout the entirety of the Mao era. Another provides a detailed accounting of the party's resurrection in 1962, as Sino-Soviet relations deteriorated. Contemporary Xinjiang scholar Ma Dazheng, on the other hand, frames the latter party as a product of the Cultural Revolution, although between two sources, he provides strikingly different details regarding the circumstances surrounding its founding. Unsurprisingly, in a private interview with Ablikim Baqi Iltebir, the veteran of the Cultural Revolution-era XIP confessed to me that the matter was an issue of some debate between even those who were involved.

Regardless the organizational relationship or lack thereof between the parties of the two eras, however, it would be remiss to ignore the membership and circumstances of the earlier group. Separated by only two decades, many veterans of the previous incarnation of XIP were still very much active in Xinjiang politics during the Cultural Revolution; some veterans of the first were a part of the latter. A revelation during the Cultural Revolution that a person had previously been involved in the pre-Liberation XIP, moreover, was in and of itself damning evidence of his or her counterrevolutionary leanings. In that regard, some parallels can be drawn between the treatment of these individuals and the treatment in Inner Mongolia of pre-Liberation members of the similarly named Inner Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party. The former and latter XIP institutions in Xinjiang were further both clandestine political parties organized along the lines of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, with adjustments made to meet the circumstances in Xinjiang.

On the eve of the second Eastern Turkistan Republic's founding in 1944, a number of underground revolutionary organizations emerged in opposition to Xinjiang's provincial government. These movements varied in ideological leanings, composition of membership, and geographic reach. Because it played a preeminent role in the founding of the Eastern Turkistan Republic, however, the Ghulja-based "Ili Liberation Organization" (*Ili azadliq tesbkilati*/Chinese: *Yili jiefang zuzhi* 伊犁解放组织)⁹² stands out as the most significant of these various movements. Its twelve members were the force behind the success of the rebel movement and constituted the core of the republic's early leadership. The Liberation Organization operated with a very narrow set of objectives. First, it sought to disseminate propaganda against the ruling regime in order to prime Xinjiang's Turki residents for revolutionary action. Second, it wished to provoke armed rebellion in order to expel the Kuomintang presence from the Three Districts. Finally, it looked to unify revolutionary organizations throughout the province in order to promote the instillation of a democratic system.⁹³ Beyond these limited points, the Liberation Organization espoused no clear ideological aims. Its membership included Turki malcontents of all backgrounds, from religious intellectuals such as Ėlixan Töre to avowed leftists such as Abdukėrim Abbasof. While this makeup allowed the Eastern Turkistan Republic to build a broad-based coalition in the Three Districts, it also set the stage for the ideological factionalism that would complicate that government's successful operation.⁹⁴

⁹² Enwer Xanbaba (1999) refers to this organization simply as the "Liberation Organization." The name "Ili Liberation Organization" can be found in its brief description in Li Sheng (2005), p. 147. Pan Zhiping 潘志平, Wang Mingye 王鸣野, and Shi Lan 石岚 (2008), meanwhile, describes it as the "Ghulja Liberation Organization" (*Yining jiefang zuzhi* 伊宁解放组织). See p. 120.

⁹³ See Enwer Xanbaba (1999), pp. 14-16.

⁹⁴ See Enwer Xanbaba (1999), p. 15.

When the provisional government of the Eastern Turkistan Republic was founded in late 1944, the Liberation Organization disbanded. Töre was selected as chairman of the new government and marshal of its armed forces, but Abbasof, appointed as Minister of Internal Affairs and Chief of Propaganda, was the filter through which information would be transmitted to the populace. From this perch, he was able to control the narrative, and to mold the ideological trajectory of the fledgling republic. This position of strength was advanced further through the efforts of other leftists in the government, including Minister of Health Qasimjan Qembiri (*Kasimujiang Kangbai'er* 卡斯穆江·康拜尔) and Minister of Education Seypidin Ezizi.⁹⁵ Seypidin, in particular, enjoyed privileged access to influence a generation of young people. At the same time, however, he complained that,

I was unable to do my job because I had two different advisers on either side of me. On the one hand were the Soviet advisers, and on the other were religious advisers. Because of this, no matter what course of action was needed, there was no choice but to listen to the opinions on both sides. The Ministry of Religious Affairs made strict demands of and were closely involved with every field, especially on cultural and educational matters. They would even set rules as to what we could and could not do. They interfered with teaching agendas and the subjects of art. Naturally, this only deepened our ideological differences.⁹⁶

Seypidin argues that a core of socialist intellectuals very quickly came to prominence within the provisional government, yet remained undeveloped as a result of the ideological pluralism on which the Eastern Turkistani government was founded. Enwer Xanbaba, on the other hand, sees practical value in this institutional diversity, even praising conservative Əlixan Töre for “taking advantage of the platforms at religious gatherings and mosques to

⁹⁵ See Enwer Xanbaba (1999), pp. 17-18.

⁹⁶ See Seypidin Ezizi, *Ömür dastani, eslime 2* (1990), p. 108.

mobilize the people on nationalist and religious grounds.”⁹⁷ In either case, leftists within the provisional government found it appropriate to expropriate their ideological cause to an outside organization, in order to advance their agenda free of conservative oversight.

The Eastern Turkistan Revolutionary Youth Organization (*Sherqiy türkistan inqilabchil yashlar tashkiloti*/Chinese: *Dong tujuesitan geming qingnian tuan* 东突厥斯坦革命青年团)⁹⁸ was founded in November of 1945. Xanbaba explains the necessity for such a group thus:

In human societies of every epoch, the training of youths and grooming of successors have been important matters, and the Three Districts Revolution was no different in this regard. In order to meet these important tasks, the provisional government and peoples of the Three Districts needed to train, organize, and utilize the youthful energy of the young people to... consolidate, unite, and galvanize them in the fight against the Kuomintang reactionaries.⁹⁹

The Revolutionary Youth Organization was not overtly ideological – much like the Liberation Organization before it, it focused on a narrow set of issues that nationalists of all leanings could support. Yet the membership of its Central Committee, announced with great pomp at its organizational meeting in Ghulja on November 15, 1945, reads as a roster of the republic’s most prominent leftists. The committee was chaired by Abdukërim Abbasof, vice chaired by Seydulla Seypullayof, and had an original membership consisting of Seypidin Ezizi, Muhemmet’imin Iminof, Enwer Xanbaba, Buqara Tishqanbayof, and Abdulla Zakirof. Of these, all but Tishqanbayof would later also serve on the Central Committee of the explicitly Marxist People’s Revolutionary Party. From its inception, the

⁹⁷ See Enwer Xanbaba (1999), p. 16.

⁹⁸ Enwer Xanbaba (1999) and Seypidin Ezizi (1990) refer to this organization only as the “Revolutionary Youth Organization.” Its full title can be found in Dang Yulin 党育林 and Zhang Yuxi 张玉玺 (2003), p. 31.

⁹⁹ See Enwer Xanbaba (1999), p. 19.

Revolutionary Youth Organization was popular, quickly expanding to a membership of fourteen thousand, spread amongst three district-level and 27 county-level branches.¹⁰⁰

With this popularity, however, also came limits to the extent to which the organization could openly pursue the ideological agenda of its founding members. Most of the Revolutionary Youth Organization's Central Committee had either attended Soviet schools or had received ideological training with the Chinese Communist Party. Chairman Abdukërim Abbasof, on the other hand, had been influenced from both directions, and was anxious to use the organization to advance the cause of Marxism throughout the Three Districts. Not long after the Revolutionary Youth Organization was founded, he organized a private study group to investigate Marxist practice and philosophy.¹⁰¹ The operation of both the Revolutionary Youth Organization and this private study were severely curtailed by outside pressure. This was once again an issue of consternation for Seypidin Ezizi, who complained that:

Conservative and retrogressive forces in society relied especially on high-ranking religious figures and their government backers to start to hinder the growth and activities of the Youth Organization. The Youth Organization, it was thought, could provide the youth with new democratic ideas, with more advanced concepts of class struggle, and ultimately with basic knowledge about socialism and communism. Yet reality would not allow this to happen.¹⁰²

According to Enwer Xanbaba, however, conservatives were not alone in their meddling. For the Soviets, keeping in line with Stalin's theory of "socialism in one country" (*socializm v odnoj strane*), political considerations often trumped revolutionary zeal in regards to communist movements in Xinjiang. As long as both the Republic of China and Xinjiang's

¹⁰⁰ See Enwer Xanbaba (1999), p. 20.

¹⁰¹ See Enwer Xanbaba (1999), pp. 23-24.

¹⁰² See Seypidin Ezizi, *Ömür dastane, eslime 2* (1990), p. 109.

provincial government maintained positive relations with the Soviet Union, then the Soviets would keep a lid on popular movements that might threaten either. Conversely, when the national or provincial government defied the Soviets, they would loosen the reins and encourage these organizations, possibly even providing material support. In either case, the Soviets desired an element of control. When they learned that the Revolutionary Youth Organization's Central Committee was independently studying Marxist philosophy, they quickly intervened to prevent such an activity absent of Soviet oversight.¹⁰³ When the coalition government was formed, the Central Committee of the Revolutionary Youth Organization moved to Dihua; when that organization attempted to organize in Xinjiang's capital, the Soviets once again objected and forced the suspension to that bid.¹⁰⁴

There is a discrepancy between sources regarding just when the Eastern Turkistan People's Revolutionary Party was founded. Seypidin reports that it was founded in late December of 1945,¹⁰⁵ a position that is reinforced in *Xinjiang's Local History*, the party-approved textbook used in Xinjiang's high schools.¹⁰⁶ Enwer Xanbaba, on the other hand, states the specific date of May 5, 1946.¹⁰⁷ This latter date is supported in Dang and Zhang's *Concise History of Contemporary Xinjiang*.¹⁰⁸ Because of the propensity of both Islamists and heavy-handed Soviet advisers to meddle, XIP was by necessity a highly secretive organization. The seven members of its Central Committee referred to one another by secret code names. Chairman Abdukërim Abbasof was referred to as "Lutfi," Seydulla Seypullayof as "Ëldan," Seypidin Ezizi as "Nur," Es'et Is'haqof (*Aisihaiti Yisihakefu* 艾斯海

¹⁰³ See Enwer Xanbaba (1999), p. 24.

¹⁰⁴ See Enwer Xanbaba (1999), p. 22.

¹⁰⁵ See Seypidin Ezizi, *Ömür dastane, eslime 2* (1990), p. 111.

¹⁰⁶ See Metrozi Hëyt (1992), p. 556.

¹⁰⁷ See Enwer Xanbaba (1999), p. 25.

¹⁰⁸ See Dang Yulin 党育林 and Zhang Yuxi 张玉玺 (2003), p. 31.

提·伊斯哈科夫) as “Ijat,” Muhemmet’imin Iminof as “Nijat,” Enwer Xanbaba as “Cholpan” and Abdulla Zakirof as “Ilghar.”¹⁰⁹ These designations were not wholly random—combining the first letters of each name formed the word *Lëninchi*, which in Uyghur means “Leninist,” an apt description of the party’s ideological leanings. XIP’s party program and constitution were modeled upon the organization of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, with adjustments made to reflect the reality of the situation in Xinjiang. According to Enwer Xanbaba, Abdukërim Abbasof directed that the party remain active primarily in promoting democracy, politically engaging the populace, and strengthening the democratic electoral process. Socialism was to be reached through democratic revolution. At the same time, he insisted that XIP remain neutral in the ongoing civil war between the Chinese Communists and the Kuomintang, and moreover that it defer discussion on formal Eastern Turkistani independence until such a time that the populace itself could democratically weigh in on the matter.¹¹⁰

The party was clandestine in nature, but its Central Committee consisted of members who were active both in government and in the Revolutionary Youth Organization. Because of their official duties and public visibility, XIP was able to engage in organizational matters in a relatively open manner, using their occupational responsibilities as a smokescreen for their partisan pursuits. The Revolutionary Youth Organization, moreover, served as fertile grounds for the recruitment of new members. Partisans in that body’s leadership were able to identify and vet some of the most promising young people in the Three Districts.

Through this means, the ranks of XIP members swelled quickly.¹¹¹ According to Seypidin

¹⁰⁹ These nicknames are according to Enwer Xanbaba (1999), p. 25. Seypidin Eziz in *Ömür dastane, eslime 2* (1990), p. 112, differs somewhat in these details. According to Seypidin, Abbasof was “Lëtip,” Seypullayof was “Ilghar,” Is’haqof was “Eldan,” Zakirof was “Nijat,” and Iminof was “Ijad.”

¹¹⁰ See Enwer Xanbaba (1999), pp. 26-27.

¹¹¹ See Enwer Xanbaba (1999), pp. 27-28.

Ezizi, by the time that Xinjiang's coalition was founded in mid-1946, the Eastern Turkistan People's Revolutionary Party already had a membership of four thousand and had branches in operation at every level throughout the region.¹¹² With a party base of this magnitude, rumors of its secret existence and nature began to spread, prompting a Soviet investigation into the matter. The inquiry by the Soviet consulate in Ghulja came up empty, but rumors persisted and intensified. Ultimately, faced with the reality that the party lacked control over how it was being portrayed, Abdukërim Abbasof and Seypidin Ezizi decided to disclose information about the People's Revolutionary Party to Soviet advisers. Whatever qualms the Central Committee may have previously held that the Soviets might compromise their operation, now they found a receptive audience. As long as they operated with caution and in secrecy, they were not a threat to Soviet political interests.¹¹³

XIP Chairman Abdukërim Abbasof was a member of Xinjiang's delegation to the Kuomintang National Congress in Nanjing starting in November of 1946. While he was there in an official capacity, he used this as an opportunity to seek out local Chinese Communist Party leader Dong Biwu (董必武), whom he saw twice in meetings arranged by a Soviet intermediary. Through these meetings, the People's Revolutionary Party began to coordinate its revolution with that of the Chinese Communist Party. This coordination was not indicative that XIP had resolved its position on the question of Xinjiang's future status, but it did fundamentally change the nature of the movement. By approaching the CCP for guidance, Abdukërim placed his party into a position that was subordinate to the wider Chinese communist movement. Nothing made this point clearer than his acquiescence to Dong's request that the People's Revolutionary Party merge with the much smaller,

¹¹² See Seypidin Ezizi, *Ömür dastani, eslime 2* (1990), pp. 116-117. The timing for this benchmark is suspect if the later founding date reported by Enwer Xanbaba is accurate.

¹¹³ See Enwer Xanbaba (1999), pp. 28.

predominantly Han “Xinjiang Union of Communists.”¹¹⁴ No longer was XIP going to be a Turkic party. This new inclusivity was a rebuttal to those who framed the movement in Xinjiang along terms of nationality and weakened the claims of legitimacy to potential aspirations for independence. When Abdukërim returned to Dihua in January of 1947, he was accompanied by a Chinese Communist Party advisor and carrying a telegram to the XIP Central Committee from CCP luminaries Zhou Enlai 周恩来 and Liu Shaoqi 刘少奇. In his report to that body, the party chairman announced the plans for a merger. If there was any dissent to this proposal, neither Enwer Xanbaba nor Seypidin Ezizi make any mention of it. The plan was formalized at a joint meeting between the two parties on February 3.¹¹⁵

With this union, the party’s name was changed to the People’s Democratic Revolutionary Party (*Xelqchil inqilabiy partiyisi/Minzhu geming dang* 民主革命党). For its Turki members, this was not a dramatic change in name. While it is unclear whether or not the party officially dropped the “Eastern Turkistan” toponym from the party name at this point (authors of post-facto primary and secondary sources on the party generally avoid using this sensitive descriptor), they informally referred to the organization both before and after the merger by the abbreviation *XIP*. In his memoirs, Seypidin Ezizi does not recognize that the name changed at all, and rather continues to refer to the party as the “People’s Revolutionary Party,” even after the point when four Han representatives from the Xinjiang Union of Communists joined the XIP Central Committee, expanding its membership from seven to eleven.¹¹⁶ Abdukërim Abbasof remained party chairman, while Es’et Is’haqof and Li Taiyu 李泰玉 were selected as vice chairman. The party program was amended to more closely

¹¹⁴ See Enwer Xanbaba (1999), pp. 30-31.

¹¹⁵ See Enwer Xanbaba (1999), pp. 31-32. Seypidin Ezizi makes only brief mention of this merger. See *Ömür dastane, eslime 2* (1990), p. 117-118.

¹¹⁶ See page 118.

mimic that of the CCP. The scope of its activities was extended throughout the province, well beyond the borders of the Three Districts; the former Xinjiang Union of Communists was reorganized as XIP's Dihua bureau.¹¹⁷ The party continued to encourage using official titles as a smokescreen for party business. According to the "Necessary Characteristics for Membership in the People's Democratic Revolutionary Party (*Xelqchil inqilabiy inqilabiy partiyisi eʼzalinida bolushqa tegishlik xususiyetler*)," promulgated by the Central Committee in 1948, members were expected to maintain secrecy while still "being close to the public, being a model for the public, and being progressive in action."¹¹⁸ On this note, Enwer Xanbaba and Seypidin Ezizi took advantage of official travel on tour to the Tarim Basin to help organize branch organizations throughout Xinjiang's south. Xanbaba reports that XIP found an eager revolutionary following in Kashgar, while in Hoten, "conditions were not yet ripe."¹¹⁹

It is unclear the extent to which Exmetjan Qasimi, president of the Eastern Turkistan Republic, was aware of the activities of the People's, and later, People's Democratic Revolutionary Party. Neither Seypidin nor Xanbaba claim him as a member of the organization, and existing sources put some distance between Exmetjan and XIP. Nonetheless, there is evidence to suggest that he did at least know of the clandestine party in 1948, when he made an appeal for all open and secret organizations and parties in Xinjiang to unify into one umbrella organization to represent the whole of the Three Districts Revolution. By this point, the coalition government had failed, and a resolution to the ongoing Chinese civil war was less than certain. Even as Exmetjan Qasimi publically declared that formal independence would be "an absolutely mistaken, wrong policy,"¹²⁰ this

¹¹⁷ See Enwer Xanbaba (1999), pp. 33-35.

¹¹⁸ See Enwer Xanbaba (1999), p. 42.

¹¹⁹ See Enwer Xanbaba (1999), p. 35.

¹²⁰ See Sadri (July 1984), p. 311. Cited in Millward (2007), p. 233.

consolidation of power was something of a contingency plan. He was laying the seeds for a potential single-party state, possibly even framed along the Marxist lines of the Soviet Union, with which the Ghulja regime enjoyed a close relationship. His February request for unity led to a late July meeting in which XIP's Central Committee agreed to largely cease operations and to join the "League for the Preservation of Peace and Democracy in Xinjiang" (*Shinjangda tinchliq we xelqchilliqni himaye qilish ittifaqi/Xinjiang baowei heping minzhu tongmeng* 新疆保卫和平民主同盟). Six of the seven original members of XIP's Central Committee were selected as well to the new League's Central Committee, and Abdulla Zakirof, the seventh, was an alternate member.¹²¹

Qasimi's call for unity, however, appears to have extended only to Xinjiang's Turki population. Hans were either not invited or were not interested in following this course. As such, the Dihua Bureau of the People's Democratic Revolutionary Party – the predominantly Han former Xinjiang Union of Communists – did not join the League but rather continued operations as usual until liberation one year later, now calling itself the "Struggle Society" (*Zhandou she* 战斗社).¹²² This parting of ways, along national lines, between the former comrades of XIP draws into question just how committed either side had been to the ideal of a united party in the first place. In the end, their respective Han and Turki agendas trumped any notion of unity between nationalities.

¹²¹ See Enwer Xanbaba (1999), pp. 47-48.

¹²² See Enwer Xanbaba (1999), pp. 42-45.

THREE

To Mr. Exmetjan of the People's Government in Xinjiang's Ghulja Special Region,

We are on the cusp of attaining victory for all of China in our country's people's liberation war against imperialism, feudalism, bureaucratic capitalism, and the reactionary governance of the Kuomintang under Chiang Kai-shek. In September, after careful preparation, we will convene a plenary session of the new National People's Consultative Conference, a body that includes all democratic parties, people's organizations, People's Liberation Army field troops, liberated areas, minority peoples at home, and Chinese peoples living abroad. This plenary session will not only formulate organizational laws and elect leaders for the consultative conference itself, but also must draft organizational laws and elect leaders for the Central People's Government of the People's Republic of China. Your struggles over the years have been a part of the democratic revolutionary movement in our country. With the victorious progress of the people's liberation war in the Northwest, Xinjiang's total liberation is at hand, and your struggles are reaching a fruitful conclusion. We cordially invite you to send five representatives to participate in the plenary session of the National People's Political Consultative Conference. Should you accept, please ensure that your representatives arrive in Beijing in early September. We look forward to your response.

Director Mao Zedong

Planning Committee of the new Political Consultative Conference

Beiping, August 18, 1949¹²³

Dear Mr. Mao Zedong,

I have received and read your note. The people of our province have long anticipated the question you have raised. We feel that a great victory in the people's liberation war is a victory both for the world and for the peoples of our province. Therefore, with the warmest sentiments, we express our gratitude and excitement to the dear Mr. Mao Zedong and will send representatives to Beijing to participate in the new Political Consultative Conference.

Regards,

Exmetjan Qasimi

Special Region People's Representative

Ghulja, August 20, 1949¹²⁴

¹²³ See Ablimit Imin, ed., *Shinjang üç wilayet inqilabiy rebirlirining JKP merkeziy komitetitigba yollighan doklati we maqaliliridin tallanma* (A Selection of Reports and Articles Submitted to the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party from the Leaders of Xinjiang's Three Districts Revolution) (Urumqi: Shinjang xelq neshriyati, 1997), pp. 1-2.

¹²⁴ See Ablimit Imin (1997), p. 21.

Autonomy, Self-Determination, or Independence

As it grew increasingly clear that communist forces would be victorious in the Chinese Civil War, many high-ranking leaders within the Eastern Turkistan Republic began reevaluating their commitments to outright independence. People's Revolutionary Party Chairman Abdukërim Abbasof had allied himself with the Chinese Communist Party following his meeting with Dong Biwu in late 1946, and soon after, brought with him the rest of his party's Central Committee. These core partisans – all of which were officials within the Ghulja regime – would play roles in arguing a case for the Chinese communists to other Eastern Turkistani leaders. The problem of Chinese governance in Xinjiang, they argued, was in fact a problem of *Kuomintang* governance. Yang Zengxin, Jin Shuren, and Sheng Shicai had all been products of the Republic of China. The Chinese Communist Party could and would turn away from the retrogressive practices of its predecessors. Its Chairman Mao Zedong was promising that Xinjiang would enjoy *autonomy* should his revolution be successful. The provisions for self-rule in Soviet Central Asia, moreover, demonstrated how such a system could work within a multi-national communist state.

The argument, further reinforced by Soviet advisors, was convincing. By the time that Exmetjan Qasimi conceptualized the League for the Preservation of Peace and Democracy in Xinjiang, he was requesting that his subordinates drop references to Eastern Turkistan altogether in favor of the provincial title Xinjiang.¹²⁵ Acceptance of provincial status, however, would be contingent upon the outcome of the ongoing civil war. Had the Kuomintang won the war, it is likely that the leaders in the Three Districts would have sought Soviet protection in a formal bid for independence, similar to how Mongolia had

¹²⁵ See Li Sheng (2005), pp. 164-165.

gained separation from China nearly three decades prior. The arrival of a telegram from Mao to Exmetjan on August 18, 1949 heralded to Eastern Turkistan's president that such a contingency would be unnecessary; a communist victory was imminent. Five deputies were invited to Beijing – as Beijing was known at the time – for the inaugural meeting of the National People's Political Consultative Conference. Among matters to be discussed were the meaning and nature of autonomy and nationhood within a multinational Chinese state. On August 23, Exmetjan departed Ghulja, accompanied by Abbasof, Ili National Army Commander-in-Chief Is'haq Beg Munonop (*Yisihakebieke* 伊斯哈克别克), Deputy Commander-in-Chief Delilqan Sugurbayof (*Dalilqan* 达列里汗), and Struggle Society Chairman Luo Zhi 罗志. Their ill-fated flight, however, never reached its destination, but rather crashed en route in Soviet airspace.¹²⁶

A slimmer alternate delegation of three, headed by Seypidin Ezizi, traveled to Beijing two weeks later. The untimely deaths of Xinjiang's primary revolutionary leaders, though, left them at a disadvantage in negotiations regarding autonomy. Exmetjan was going to engage the situation from a position of strength, while Seypidin entered talks, in the wake of tragedy, with an air of uncertainty. Of course, it is unclear that Exmetjan's survival would have significantly altered the course of history, but conspiracy theories abound. Unsubstantiated rumors suggest that Mao had promised Exmetjan the opportunity for a democratic popular vote to determine the nature of Xinjiang's relationship with China, not excluding the possibility of independence. This was allegedly a matter of discussion that would be settled when he arrived in Beijing.¹²⁷ With his passing, however, that conversation

¹²⁶ See Li Sheng (2005), p. 169. See also Millward (2007), pp. 233-234.

¹²⁷ See Anwar Rahman, *Sinicization Beyond the Great Wall: China's Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region* (Leicester, UK: Matador, 2007), pp. 43-44.

would never happen. This leads some to question whether the plane crash was an intentional act, orchestrated by Mao, the Soviets, or both, to prevent talk of Xinjiang's self-determination from ever happening.

It is not entirely far-fetched to consider that such an exchange would have been on the table. Even while China's republican government in 1924 still claimed Mongolia as Chinese territory, Chinese Communist Party General Secretary Chen Duxiu 陈独秀 celebrated the founding of the Mongolian People's Republic, writing, "We support that, on the basis the right to national self-determination, the Mongolian people have the rights to independence and rebellion."¹²⁸ At the first plenary session of the Party's Sixth Congress in 1928, the party platform formally indicated that the CCP "acknowledged the right of nationalities to self-determination."¹²⁹ Mao Zedong's Jiangxi Soviet in 1931 adopted a resolution that "In the basic law (constitution) of the Chinese Soviet Republic, we must understand the regulations towards the right to self-determination among minority nationalities living within China's borders, including the rights of self-determination for secession and independence from China. It unconditionally recognizes the independence of Outer Mongolia."¹³⁰ The fourteenth article of the Soviet's constitution further reinforced this position, stating,

¹²⁸ See Du Gangjian 杜钢建, *Zhongguo jin bainian renquan sixiang* 中国近百年人权思想 (Thoughts on Human Rights in Twentieth Century China) (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2004), p. 132.

¹²⁹ See Chinese Communist Party Central Committee, "Zhongyang tonggao di er hao – di liu ci quanguo daibiao de zongjie yu jingshen" 中央通告第二号——第六次全国代表大会的总结与精神 (The Center's Second Announcement: The Conclusions and Spirit of the Sixth National Congress), July 1928, *Zhongguo gongchandang xinwen* 中国共产党新闻 (Chinese Communist Party News) <http://dangshi.people.com.cn/GB/151935/176588/176591/10555415.html> (Accessed 4 November 2014).

¹³⁰ Quoted in Xi Qingqing 奚庆庆, "Guo gong neizhan qianhou yingguo dui guomindang de taidu yanbian" 国共内战前后英国对国民党的态度演变 (The Development of the English Attitude towards the Guomindang Before and After the Chinese Civil War), *Anhui shifan daxue xuebao* 安徽师范大学学报 (The Anhui Normal University Journal), fourth quarter 2013, 486-493.

The Soviet government of China recognizes the right of self-determination of the national minorities in China, their right to complete separation from China, and to the formation of an independent state for each national minority. All Mongolians, Tibetans, Miao, Yao, Koreans, and others living on the territory of China shall enjoy the full right to self-determination, i.e. they may either join the Union of Chinese Soviets or secede from it and form their own state as they may prefer.¹³¹

As late as 1940, Mao is known to have publically advocated this manner of self-determination.¹³²

Yet self-determination (*zizhu* 自主) and autonomy (*zizhi* 自治) as proposed in 1949 were two different things, and the nuanced distinction between the two concepts was initially quite vague. In the former, a titular *minzu* would be identified in a particular region. Representatives of that nationality would hold the highest reins of power within that region, and its people would be reserved the right to secede if they so desired. Xinjiang's intellectuals, taking the rights to self-determination as recognized in the Soviet Union as a point-of-reference, approached *autonomy* with the expectation that it would afford the same privileges in Xinjiang. Yet time and again when they proposed these ideas to their local Communist Party leadership, they were met with rebuke.¹³³ In a 1957 speech, Premier Zhou Enlai explained that self-determination would be inappropriate in Xinjiang because the region was essentially too diverse.

We must not overemphasize the separateness of the nationalities. If we were now to stress that the nationalities could be separated, then the imperialists could take advantage of that. Even if it does not succeed, it could complicate *minzu* cooperation. For example, before liberation, there were some

¹³¹ See Tony Saich and Benjamin Yang, eds., *The Rise to Power of the Chinese Communist Party: Documents and Analysis* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1995), p. 555.

¹³² See Walker Connor, *The National Question in Marxist-Leninist Theory and Strategy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), p. 89.

¹³³ See Gardner Bovingdon, "Autonomy in Xinjiang: Han Nationalist Imperatives and Uyghur Discontent," *Policy Studies*, no. 11 (2004), pp. 12-13.

reactionaries in Xinjiang who engaged in Eastern Turkistan separatist activity; the imperialists exploited that. In view of this, while establishing the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, we did not endorse the use of the name Uyghurstan. Xinjiang is home to more than just the Uyghurs, but also twelve other minzu, and we couldn't make a *stan* for each. In the end, the party and government decided to create the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, and our Xinjiang comrades also agreed... China's nationalities should be united, not divided. We should emphasize *minzu* cooperation and mutual support, while opposing the separation and "self-reliance" of the nationalities.¹³⁴

According to Zhou, self-determination might be appropriate for a region in which there was a near-uniform national identity, but Xinjiang was home to thirteen separate *minzu*!

On this argument, two points should be noted. First, the people of the region had already confronted the problem of Xinjiang's diversity. Decades prior, the founders of the first Eastern Turkistan Republic had rejected the alternative name Uyghurstan precisely on the grounds that it would have been exclusionary of non-Uyghurs. By contrast, the name Eastern Turkistan encompassed Uyghurs, Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, and others, all under one tent. The salience of this identification can be demonstrated by its adoption by the second Eastern Turkistan Republic, as well as a preponderance of subsequent popular movements in the region. Second, *minzu* classifications in Xinjiang were not organic developments, but rather were the project of socialist ethnographers. Soviets began the work of taxonomizing people in the early 1920s. While some Xinjiang intellectuals began internalizing Soviet-recognized nationalities within that first decade, Sheng Shicai, after he joined the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, was more directly responsible for promoting their widespread adoption throughout the province. With few modifications, ethnographers in the People's Republic of China reaffirmed the *minzu* determinations that had been made by the Soviets

¹³⁴ See Zhou Enlai 周恩来, *Zhou enlai xuanji* 周恩来选集 [Selected Works of Zhou Enlai], Vol. 2 (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1984) pp. 259-261.

and Sheng Shicai before them. Whereas Uyghur identity was a top-down designation, Eastern Turkistani was a national identity formulated from the bottom up. Thus, communist leaders were working to deconstruct the unifying consensus that had been found in Eastern Turkistan, while subsequently promoting Turkic diversity. At the same time, they were using that diversity as a justification to restrict self-determination. Previously, the Eastern Turkistan People's Revolutionary Party had been a movement of Eastern Turkistani individuals; now, Es'et Is'haqof was Tatar, Seypidin Ezizi and Muhemmet'imin Iminof were Uyghurs, and Enwer Xanbaba was Uzbek. They were encouraged to work together under the principle of "nationality unity" (*minzu tuanjie* 民族团结), but they were not to be so mistaken as to believe that they were one people.

When in 1955 the provincial government was reorganized into the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, its very structure reinforced divisions amongst Turkis. The inclusion of the "Uyghur" ethnonym in its name might suggest that it was going to be the domain of that eponymous *minzu*, but the reality was far more complex. In what Gardner Bovingdon describes as "a stroke of administrative genius," much of the territory was parceled into a constellation of "sub-autonomies" that were assigned to various other *minzu*.¹³⁵ For instance, the Bayingolin (*Bayinguoleng* 巴音郭楞) Mongol Autonomous Prefecture covers more than one quarter of Xinjiang's territory, with a land area (462,700 sq. km) larger than the states of California (423,967 sq. km) and Maryland (32,131 sq. km) combined, still with room to spare. With fifteen percent of Xinjiang's land area, the Ili Kazakh Autonomous Prefecture (268,778 sq. km) is analogous in size to the state of Colorado (268,431 sq. km). The Changji (昌吉) Hui Autonomous Prefecture (77,129 sq. km) is larger than all of the New England

¹³⁵ See Bovingdon (2004), p.13.

states combined (71,992 sq. km). The Kizilsu (*Kezilesu* 克孜勒苏) Kyrgyz Autonomous Prefecture (69,112 sq. km) is larger than West Virginia (62,756 sq. km).¹³⁶ When all is accounted for, Uyghurs exercise “autonomy” in less than one half of Xinjiang’s territory, primarily in non-contiguous urban areas. It should be noted, moreover, that the titular minorities in the various sub-autonomies rarely constitute a majority of the populations in those regions.¹³⁷

Section five of China’s 1954 constitution laid out the framework by which national autonomous areas would operate. Autonomy emphatically did not mean that an area would be self-governing in any meaningful way. Rather, it implied that representatives of the recognized primary *minzu* were guaranteed positions within local governments. Administratively, these governments would closely resemble their non-autonomous analogues from elsewhere in China. They held control over finances and public security. They also had the right to enact legislation based on local circumstances, subject to the approval of the Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress. Finally, some accommodation would be made to allow the use of non-Chinese languages in government, education, official publications, and public signage.¹³⁸ In practice in Xinjiang, for every non-Han functionary, there was a Han counterpart of superior rank. The aforementioned system of nested autonomies limited the extent to which any given autonomous government had control over even finance and public security.

¹³⁶ For land area numbers in Xinjiang, see *Shinjangning 40 yili* (Xinjiang’s 40 Years), Beijing: Junggo statistika neshriyati (中国统计出版社) (1999), p. 458. For comparative land areas of US States, I have consulted *The World Almanac and Book of Facts 2008* (New York: Readers Digest, 2007), p. 449.

¹³⁷ See Bovingdon (2004), p. 13-14.

¹³⁸ See Liu Shao-chi, *Report on the Draft Constitution of the People’s Republic of China/ Constitution of the People’s Republic of China* (Beijing: Waiwen chubanshe, 1962), pp. 85-87.

Further eroding the territory over which the regional government had control was the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps (*Xinjiang shengchan jianshe bingtuan* 新疆生产建设兵团, henceforth the *Bingtuan*). The *Bingtuan* was a paramilitary organization organized with the express purpose of establishing security and aiding development throughout the vast territory, and consisted primarily of demobilized soldiers – ninety percent Han – from the PLA, from China’s pre-liberation National Army, and from the National Army of the former Eastern Turkistan Republic. Structurally, they resembled *tuntian* 屯田 military farms of the past, used by successive historical Central States dynasties to maintain an imperial presence in the distant Tarim Basin. Now, the *Bingtuan* was settled into colonies scattered throughout Xinjiang, independent of regional control and covering a land area of 74,300 square kilometers, yet another territory larger than New England that was not answerable to Uyghur autonomy.¹³⁹

Still, for autonomy to work, limited as it may be, the Chinese Communist Party was going to need loyal cadres from the local population. The former Eastern Turkistan People’s Revolutionary Party had been an ally of the CCP during the Chinese Civil War. Now, its membership was a natural source of cadres for a new administration. Remaining former members of XIP’s Central Committee were tapped to prominent positions of local leadership. Seypidin Ezizi in particular enjoyed Mao’s confidence, and even weathered the turbulence of the Cultural Revolution era largely unscathed.¹⁴⁰ Others too, including political and military leaders from the Eastern Turkistan Republic and former Kuomintang officials, were incorporated in local administration. Burhan Shehidi, after being sent to Nanjing by Zhang Zhizhong to gain connections and experience with the Kuomintang, returned in 1949

¹³⁹ See McMillen (1979), pp. 56-67.

¹⁴⁰ See Enwer Xanbaba (1996) pp. 285-286. See also McMillen (1979), pp. 70-71.

to replace Xinjiang's deeply unpopular chairman Mes'ut Sabri. He maintained this post for a time after liberation, joined the Chinese Communist Party, and for years to come remained a part of Xinjiang's political elite.¹⁴¹ The Ili National Army was incorporated into the People's Liberation Army as its Fifth Army Corps, with Seypidin Ezizi at its helm.¹⁴²

Continued Underground Organizations and Dissent in Mao-era Xinjiang

Popular dissent persisted following liberation. Many were willing to give the Chinese model of autonomy a chance to prove itself, but some remained committed to the ideals of an independent Eastern Turkistani state. Osman Batur and his followers continued their longstanding insurrection in the northern Altay Mountains, although they found themselves increasingly isolated. Neither Mongolia nor the Soviet Union nor the Kuomintang would be willing to provide assistance, and they were surrounded on all sides. The rebel leader was captured and summarily executed in 1951.¹⁴³ Other isolated resistance movements also continued to organize. The Eastern Turkistan Republic's Islamist factions, for instance, were not fully vanquished. After socialist-leaning leaders folded the Three Districts Revolution into the wider Chinese Communist movement in 1949, the Ghulja-based religious scholar Abdulla Damolla (*Abudula Damaola* 阿不都拉大毛拉) founded a clandestine nationalist party to recover the cause of the Eastern Turkistani independence. His "Great Turkist Islamic Party" (*pantürkizm islam partiyisi*¹⁴⁴ / Chinese: *da tujuezhuji yisilan*

¹⁴¹ See McMillen (1979), pp. 33-34.

¹⁴² See McMillen (1979), p. 52.

¹⁴³ See Pan Zhiping 潘志平, Wang Mingye 王鸣野, and Shi Lan 石岚 (2008), p. 132.

¹⁴⁴ The original Uyghur name for this organization is dubious. The name provided here (meaning the Pan-Turkist Islamic Party) comes from the Uyghur language translation of Li Sheng's widely distributed and translated *Xinjiang of China: Its Past and Present*. The Chinese and Uyghur versions of the name, however, are not a clear match, and a Google search of that name in Uyghur yields no results. Since this source is a Chinese product that was translated into Uyghur, it is possible that the translators were unaware of the original name. See Li Sheng, ed., *Junggo shingjangning tarixi we hazirqi ehwali* (Xinjiang of China: Its Past and Present) (Urumqi: Shinjang xelq neshriyati, 2006), p. 629.

dang 大突厥主义伊斯兰党) enjoyed a particular following within the former Ili National Army, which had been incorporated – absent ideological vetting – into the Fifth Army Corps of the People’s Liberation Army. Thus Sergeant Raxmanof (*Rehemannuofu* 热合曼诺夫) of the Fifth Army’s Ghulja Garrison was also Chairman of the Great Turkist Islamic Party’s Ghulja Bureau. As early as April of 1950, there were rumors of a plot to oust the Chinese from the region. Posters and fliers around the city declared that “Uyghurs should all unite under the banner of the star and crescent,” a reference to Eastern Turkistan’s blue and white flag. Under Raxmanof’s direction, the party moreover sent missions to Dihua, Kashgar, and Altai to expand its base and coordinate the start of new anti-Chinese revolutionary actions. By mid-July of that year, the Great Turkist Islamic Party had eight branches and a membership of 1,500 in the Ili District. They would stage an uprising on July 15, a date that one Chinese source identifies as the Muslim holiday of Eid al-Fitr.¹⁴⁵

When attempting to plot mass action such as an uprising, a clandestine organization faces many challenges. How do they maintain secrecy while simultaneously drawing popular interest to their proposed activities? The Three Districts-era People’s Revolutionary Party was exceedingly careful. It built a network from amongst only the most trusted people, and never even attempted a mass activity of this nature. Rather, its members worked from within the system, using their official titles as cover while they quietly advanced the cause of democratic and ultimately socialist revolution. To attempt something on the scale that the Great Turkist Islamic Party was planning, there would need to be some assurance that the

¹⁴⁵ See Ma Dazheng 马大正 (2003), p. 33. See also Li Sheng (2005), p. 259. Li Sheng identifies July 15, 1950 as Eid al-Fitr. Other sources that I consulted online, however, state that Eid in 1950 started two days later, on July 17. This discrepancy may be a simple error on the part of the author, or it may be indicative that the rebels were mistaken in regards to the dates for the religious observance. In the context of an overarching argument, however, that Raxmanof was a religious extremist, it is also possible that this was an intentional obfuscation, intended to assign religious symbolism to an event where the religious angle might not otherwise be so obvious.

movement would be a success. Look, for example, at the vastly different outcomes of the first and second Eastern Turkistan republics. Despite apocryphal accounts that put the British behind the first Eastern Turkistan Republic, in all reality that movement enjoyed little outside support. It only survived as long as it did because of its relative remoteness, underdeveloped infrastructure, and a chaotic domestic situation in China. While the domestic situation during the second Eastern Turkistan Republic was no less chaotic, it was a little less remote and its infrastructure a little more developed. Yet Soviet support added a level of security that allowed for it to take bold action with confidence that it could survive. The Great Turkist Islamic Party had no such backup, and once it acted, its organization would be thrust into public view. It turns out that advertising their proposed actions through word of mouth, posters, and pamphlets was not the best course of action. By early July, Chinese security had already acted to quell potential rebel acts.

Nonetheless, despite this setback, elements of a weakened Great Turkist Islamic Party remained mobilized. Raxmanof and a core of around one hundred followers from the PLA's Fifth Field Army were undetected after their initial plot was uncovered. In fact, they delayed, but did not cancel, their planned July uprising. Rescheduled for July 26, security forces once again preemptively uncovered and dismantled this attempt, arresting several rebels and sending Raxmanof into hiding. The Ghulja leader himself was arrested in mid-August, apprehended from a cellar in the village of Qishlaqtam (*Kexilaketami* 克西拉克塔米).¹⁴⁶ The day after his arrest, an armed rebellion erupted in nearby Zhaosu 昭苏 (*Mongghulküre*) County, headed by the local Fifth Field Army's Assistant Sargeant Salihjan (*Shalijiang* 沙里江) and his Kazakh subordinate Idris Nalpas (*Yidelisi Nu'erpaiyisi* 依德利

¹⁴⁶ See Li Sheng (2005), p. 259.

斯·奴尔派依斯), both of whom are described by Ma Dazheng as close friends of Raxmanof.¹⁴⁷ They led a band of 36 men, most also from the military, and overtook the village of Shad (*Xiate* 夏特), where they conscripted an additional force of two hundred. In a public rally, Li Sheng reports that Idris incited the crowd with the (false) assertion that “The United States has already dropped a nuclear bomb on the Soviet Union. We will establish an Islamic government with the aid of the Americans.”¹⁴⁸ The crowd referred to itself as the “Loyal and Righteous Army of the Islamic Government,” and after committing acts of petty vandalism in Shad, proceeded to make an attempt to capture Zhaosu, Tëkes (*Tekesi* 特克斯), and Ghulja. En route, however, the fighters were confronted by a Chinese anti-insurgent force, and the group’s leaders were arrested.¹⁴⁹

The ultimate fate of Abdulla Damolla and his Great Turkist Islamic Party is unclear. However, many of his followers were arrested and tried between the summer and fall of 1950. On October 19, there was a mass rally in Ghulja organized by the Ili government and attended by some fifteen thousand participants who were called explicitly to condemn the phenomenon “pan-Turkism.” In March of the following year, the League for the Preservation of Peace and Democracy in Xinjiang, by now fully absorbed as a mass organization under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party, released an article titled “Resolutely Rid the Xinjiang League of ‘Pan-Turkist’ Elements.” With this article, a formal local campaign was initiated not only to counter “pan-Turkist” influence, but also against “pan-Islamism” and “separatism.”¹⁵⁰ This campaign continues to this day.

¹⁴⁷ See Ma Dazheng 马大正 (2003), p. 34.

¹⁴⁸ See Li Sheng (2005), p. 259.

¹⁴⁹ See Ma Dazheng 马大正 (2003), p. 34. See also Li Sheng (2005), p. 260.

¹⁵⁰ See Li Sheng (2005), p. 260.

At the same time that the Great Turkist Islamic Party was active in Xinjiang's north, Muhemmed Imin Bughra – the former emir of the Islamic Kingdom of Hoten – and Isa Yusuf Alptekin – an ally and veteran of the first Eastern Turkistan Republic – were allegedly organizing resistance movements in the south. As the two men recognized the inevitability of a communist victory, they desperately began establishing militant anti-communist underground sleeper cells throughout the Tarim Basin. Bughra and Alptekin are credited with being the masterminds behind pro-independence sleeper cells in Kucha (*Kuche* 库车), Hoten, and Ruoqiang 若羌 (*Chaqiliq*). They further provided radios that would allow two-way communication between the various underground organizations that they founded. This constellation of anti-Chinese collaborators formed a core of what they referred to as hidden “landmines” (*mēna*, or *dilei* 地雷), set to go into the open when conditions would allow. Ayuf Qariy (*Ayufu Hari* 阿尤甫·哈日), head mullah at the Wasteland Madrasa (*Xangdi medrisisi*, or *Huangdi maidelisi jingtang* 荒地麦德利斯经堂) in Qaghiliq, was one such “landmine.”¹⁵¹

Qariy came from a long family line of devout Muslims. He founded the Wasteland Madrasa in 1945, and within a very short period, it had established itself as one of the premier centers of Islamic learning in all of Xinjiang. At its peak, it boasted a student body of nearly four thousand, with *talips* (students) hailing from all corners of the Tarim Basin. Because this, Ayuf Qariy was extraordinarily influential and well-connected in Xinjiang's religious circles.¹⁵² As Muhemmed Imin Bughra fled the communist advance, Ayuf Qariy invited him to speak before a gathering of students and religious scholars at the Wasteland

¹⁵¹ See Pan Zhiping 潘志平, Wang Mingye 王鸣野, and Shi Lan 石岚 (2008), p. 133.

¹⁵² See Li Sheng (2005), p. 264.

Madrasa. At this assembly, Memtimin told the crowd that “a third world war will erupt in two to three years, and we will return at that time. You should prepare weapons and personnel. When the time comes, we will take Xinjiang back from the hands of the communists and reestablish the ‘Eastern Turkistan Islamic Republic.’”¹⁵³ Soon after, Muhemmed Imin Bughra and Isa Yusuf Alptekin crossed into Kashmir, from where they maintained a continuous correspondence with Ayuf Qariy. Messages were relayed back and forth with the help of Abdulhimit Damolla (*Abuduyimiti Damaola* 阿不都依米提大毛拉), a devoted follower of Muhemmed Imin Bughra and a highly respected mullah from Qaraqash (*Moyu* 墨玉) County, located north of Hoten. When China joined the Korean War in the late spring of 1950, the People’s Liberation Army began a strategic reshuffle. Seeing this as an opportunity for action, Bughra sent a note to Ayuf Qariy telling the mullah to mobilize his activist network. On the ground, however, the timing was not quite as fortuitous as it might have seemed from afar. Between Communist Party campaigns for land reform and the suppression of counterrevolutionaries, the atmosphere was already politically charged. Ayuf summoned more than forty religious leaders to his Wasteland Madrasa in Qaghiliq from as far away as Urumqi, Turpan, Kucha, and Kashgar. They discussed plans, but ultimately decided that the timing for collective action was wrong.¹⁵⁴

By late 1953, political pressure stemming from land reform and related campaigns settled somewhat, and Muhemmed Imin Bughra’s plot to eject the Chinese from the Tarim Basin once again gained momentum. This was despite mounting pressure that the exiled

¹⁵³ See Pan Zhiping 潘志平, Wang Mingye 王鸣野, and Shi Lan 石岚 (2008), p. 133. While the authors present this as a direct quote, the source, assuming that one exists, is unclear. I find it questionable that Muhemmed Imin Bughra would, in the course of a speech about Eastern Turkistan’s independence, refer to the region by its Chinese provincial title.

¹⁵⁴ See Muxtar Mamut and Uyghun Abduweli, eds., *Xotenning qisqiche tarixi* (A Brief History of Hoten) (Urumqi: Shinjang xelq neshriyati, 2005), p. 574-575. See also Ma Dazheng 马大正 (2003), pp. 36-37 and Pan Zhiping 潘志平, Wang Mingye 王鸣野, and Shi Lan 石岚 (2008), p. 134.

Uyghur leader faced from Indian authorities, forcing him from his Kashmiri staging grounds into Turkey in October of that year. Isa Yusuf Alptekin would follow in the summer of 1954, effectively making Turkey a new center of Eastern Turkistan activism.¹⁵⁵ In late 1953, Abdulhimit Damolla met in Qaghiliq with Musa Xalifa (*Musha Halifa* 木沙哈里发), a chief backer of the Wasteland Mosque, and began making plans for Bughra's "landmines" to begin taking action.¹⁵⁶ At the same time, a well-placed Bughra supporter working in Kashgar's city government tasked Qaghiliq Mullah Ablikim Mexsum (*Abulikemu Maibesumu Damaola* 阿不力克木·买合苏木大毛拉) to write an ideological treatise amalgamating elements of Islamic tradition with the nationalist Eastern Turki narrative presented in Muhemmed Imin Bughra's 1940 book *A History of Eastern Turkistan*. The result was *The Seven Lives* (*Yette turmush/Qi ge shenghuo* 七个生活), a seminal text for this faction of separatists. The book impressed activists with the theoretical foundations and guidelines to dictate the pursuit for independence, arguing that both Islam and the Eastern Turki nation needed to be protected from China, whose "colonial economy" in Xinjiang threatened the prospects of both.¹⁵⁷

Through a series of clandestine meetings over the course of 1954, Abdulhimit is alleged to have amassed a force of fifteen thousand followers throughout the Hoten area. This culminated in December with a three-day "Meeting of Representatives for the Islamic

¹⁵⁵ See Pan Zhiping 潘志平, Wang Mingye 王鸣野, and Shi Lan 石岚 (2008), p.136.

¹⁵⁶ See Ma Dazheng 马大正 (2003), p. 37.

¹⁵⁷ See Pan Zhiping 潘志平, Wang Mingye 王鸣野, and Shi Lan 石岚 (2008), p. 135. Mexsum, a highly regarded intellectual and advocate for independence, would spend much of the Mao era in prison. Upon his release in 1979, he continued training a new generation of nationalist thinkers. He and his followers were referred to in Chinese media and scholarship pre-9/11 as "separatists." In a display of post-2001 historical revisionism, however, they would be called "terrorists." See "Sēntebir weqesidin ilgiri 'bölgünchi,' sēntebirdin këyin bolsa 'tërrorchî'" (A "Separatist" Before the September Incident, and a "Terrorist" After), *Radio Free Asia*, 6 March 2007, <http://www.rfa.org/uyghur/programmilar/shexsler/ablikim-mexsum-20070306.html> (accessed 21 January 2016).

Government” at a private residence in the village of Shorbagh (*Xiao'erbaque* 肖尔巴克).

During the course of this meeting, representatives decided on an eleven-member governing council, an organizational program, and a revolutionary strategy. According to these plans, the initial uprisings would begin on January 1, 1955, with coordinated attacks in Hoten, Qaraqash County, and Lop (*Lopu* 洛浦) County. In advance of the planned dates, however, local security forces learned of the plot. Through a focused propaganda campaign and other preemptive actions, they managed to deescalate the situation. Nonetheless, Abdulhimit Damolla, fighting with a skeleton crew of followers, made a desperate, considerably less ambitious attempt on December 31 to take control of an agricultural reform-through-labor camp near Hoten. This attack, however, was quickly suppressed, leading to the arrest of dozens. Abdulhimit Damolla escaped the scene to allegedly plan three more failed attempts in 1956 and 1957, each time evading arrest.¹⁵⁸ During the same period, Musa Xalifa banded with his trusted follower Jilil Qariy (*Jilili Hari* 吉利里·哈日) to form a western branch of the proposed “Islamic Government of Eastern Turkistan.”

Centered in Yëngisar (*Yingjisha* 英吉沙), their followers included a high proportion of young *talips*. This group too was preemptively stopped in late May of 1956, and after a brief battle between the government and nationalists, Jilil Qariy was apprehended. A search of Jilil’s home found a handwritten copy of Ablikim Mexsum’s *The Seven Lives*, which he claimed to have been his primary ideological influence. In interrogations, Jilil made three primary points. First of all, he argued that the Chinese were colonizers of the Tarim Basin. Second, all Turkis constituted a single nationality, but the Chinese had imposed the socialist

¹⁵⁸ See Muxtar Mamut and Uyghun Abduweli (2005), pp. 576-582. See also Pan Zhiping 潘志平, Wang Mingye 王鸣野, and Shi Lan 石岚 (2008), p. 134.

nationalities policy as a means to divide that nation and establish control. Finally, the Chinese wished to control and curtail Islamic religious practice.¹⁵⁹

Promise and Disillusionment in Mao's China

In the early years following liberation, policymakers in Xinjiang treaded lightly. As demonstrated, the indigenous opposition that the communist regime faced was not insignificant, and Soviet advisers recommended a measured and incremental approach to enacting revolutionary legislation. The regional autonomy law allowed for these kinds of accommodations in Xinjiang, Tibet, and Inner Mongolia.¹⁶⁰ In deescalating the aforementioned separatist uprisings, Chinese security forces favored diplomacy and propaganda over the use of force.¹⁶¹ In dealing with Islam as well, communist administration initially attempted to coopt rather than attack. Religious organizations and influential clerics would be brought into the fold with the auspices of the government-backed Islamic Association of China under the leadership of Burhan Shehidi, in an arrangement that would theoretically allow the Communist Party direct influence over religious believers. The reality of this arrangement, however, was limited by the extent to which members of the Islamic Association were actually interested in cooperating. Indeed, Ablikim Muxsum and other leaders of Muhemmed Imin Bughra's Islamic Government of Eastern Turkistan had themselves been members and held official positions in local

¹⁵⁹ See Pan Zhiping 潘志平, Wang Mingye 王鸣野, and Shi Lan 石岚 (2008), pp. 134-135. See also Ma Dazheng 马大正 (2003), pp. 37-38. Based on these sources, Chinese security forces at this time period had an extraordinarily high success rate in preempting and dismantling potential threats to Chinese rule in Xinjiang. This is either highly impressive or highly suspect. It is possible that China's security apparatus was just naturally effective, or that training from seasoned Soviet spy agencies propelled this nearly perfect record. On the other hand, it is worth considering if there might be a contemporary political imperative that might require an author to emphasize the competence of the security forces while diminishing the abilities of dissenters.

¹⁶⁰ See Millward (2007), pp. 246-247.

¹⁶¹ In both *A Brief History of Hoten* and *The History and Current Situation of "Eastern Turkistan,"* the authors stress that each of these attempted uprisings was resolved by diplomatic means.

government, yet were also the heads of a movement that posed a significant threat to Chinese rule in the Tarim Basin.¹⁶² In view of this, it is quite possible that the Hoten incidents figured prominently in calculations leading to the increasingly hard stances taken against Islamic religious practice after 1956.

Before that date, the primary impositions levied against Xinjiang's Islamic institutions were in the fields of jurisprudence and funding. The authority of religious-based *qazi* courts that had long managed judicial matters in Muslim communities was now handed over to the People's Courts. At the same time, local religious organizations were no longer allowed to collect obligatory *waqf* taxes from local populations as a source of support. Now, it was the state that would pay the salaries of religious figures and maintain the mosques.¹⁶³ During the same period, the government sought to confront *minzu* nationalisms, not only the "local nationalism" of Uyghurs and other Turkic peoples, but also "Han chauvinism." A 1951 report recognizes that:

[Resentment of Chinese Rule], being the result of long years of historical development, [is] not to be eradicated in any short length of time. Consequently, hereafter it is... [necessary] to rectify the mistaken tendency towards a narrow interpretation of nationalism among the national minorities, in particular to rectify the tendency towards 'great nationalism' [chauvinism] prevalent among the Han cadres.¹⁶⁴

Han cadres were to be respectful and humble in dealing with local populations. The use of force would be counterproductive, and disincentivize their cooperation. Since its initial provincehood in the nineteenth century Qing Empire, subsequent Chinese administrations in Xinjiang had failed spectacularly at presenting a compelling reason for its indigenous

¹⁶² See Pan Zhiping 潘志平, Wang Mingye 王鸣野, and Shi Lan 石岚 (2008), p. 135.

¹⁶³ See Millward (2007), p. 247-248. See also McMillen (1979), p. 114.

¹⁶⁴ Quoted in McMillen (1979), p. 114.

inhabitants to identify with the Chinese state. Clearly, the People's Republic was setting itself up to be a break from this sad tradition.

Scholars outside of the PRC generally blame Xinjiang's more hardline policies regarding nationality and religion post-1956 on China's changing political climate. Indeed, Sino-Soviet relations by this point were becoming strained, in part a result of the Soviet Union's dramatic and public shift towards de-Stalinization as a matter of official policy as of February of 1956. Chairman Mao's own ego and a competitive propensity towards one-upmanship also led him to command more ambitious policy objectives. Soviet advisers in Xinjiang had advised moderation in upending the region's social and political climate. Now, however, policymakers were expected to ignore that advice, throw caution to the wind, and accelerate the pace of change. Yet while all of this certainly contributed to increasingly dramatic political shifts in Xinjiang, it is worth considering too the deleterious effects that a continued stream of local independence activism may have also had on policies encouraging moderation. Communist true believers may have naively thought that they could cut through decades of anti-China animus through kindness and with measures intended to curb the power of local institutions and elites. Independence movements came as a result of exploitation and not out of any genuine popular desire for separation from China. Once the masses became politically aware and the exploiters were held accountable, they reasoned, the people would find the pursuit of independence wholly unnecessary. The flaws in this logic became increasingly clear, however, in view of the resilience that independence movements demonstrated.

The Islamic Government of Eastern Turkistan was particularly problematic for these communist fantasies. Several participants in these movements were people who benefited from the benevolence of the Chinese state. The government provided salaries and

government titles to religious elites, while increasing the status and landholdings of the average poor peasant. Yet in testament to the appeal of the move for self-determination, these same people continued to desire separation from China. PRC sources explain away the complacency of the masses in these incidents by describing participants as having been “confused” into carrying out these actions (in Chinese, *gubuo* 蛊惑, or Uyghur, *qaymuqqan*). Their passive susceptibility to the suggestions of such nefarious influences was the only reasonable explanation for why they would fight for a cause such as separation from the Chinese state. This “confusion” was a treatable condition, however, something that could be overcome through propaganda and properly administered political conditioning. About the de-escalation of the March 9, 1956 assault on Hoten’s Third Agricultural Corps, *A Brief History of Hoten* explains that,

The soldiers responding to the riot, cadres, and the public encircled the rebels so that not one would be able to escape. The *confused* [emphasis mine] masses were given political reeducation. Party and government leaders at the scene gave a warning to the rebels and explained party policy... The rioters dispersed, most of them discarding their weaponry.¹⁶⁵

Fortunately for the rebels, the perception that the masses had merely been fooled into their activities meant that in meting out punishments, reform was always possible. Of those who had been arrested for their participation in the events related to the Islamic Government of Eastern Turkistan, *The History and Current Situation of “Eastern Turkistan”* states that “the majority of those who had previously been confused were educated, reformed, and had their good names restored.”¹⁶⁶ Regardless, it is too simple to suggest that the crowds were simply unthinking and misguided. In *The Seven Lives*, Ablikim Mexsum presented a cogent ideology

¹⁶⁵ See Muxtar Mamut and Uyghun Abduweli (2005), p. 579.

¹⁶⁶ See Pan Zhiping 潘志平, Wang Mingye 王鸣野, and Shi Lan 石岚 (2008), p. 134.

that stood in opposition to that being presented by Chinese propagandists. It was inconvenient for authorities, but compelling nonetheless to many of those who read the text and considered its points. Those who favored independence on the merits of this work were “confused” only inasmuch as they believed that they had a chance at succeeding in their pursuit. Faced with this nature of countervailing force and ideology, the decision to adopt a more hardline stance against both religion and local nationalism in Xinjiang was a perfectly rational shift, one that made sense beyond simply being a reflection of China’s changing political environment.

Even among local intellectuals who initially supported Chinese-style autonomy, some grew disillusioned with the failure of that system to meet their expectations. The Hundred Flowers Campaign in 1956 provided a forum through which they could air their grievances. A late 1957 speech by Seypidin Ezizi was revealing of some of the criticisms that had been levied against the regime. He emphasized that Xinjiang had always been and would always be an integral part of China’s territory. He assured his comrades that Exmetjan Qasimi had indeed shared this view in his lifetime, and wanted nothing more than for Xinjiang to be a part of China’s wider socialist revolution. He expressed defiance against the view that non-Hans who collaborated with the Chinese communist regime were “jackals serving the Han people.” To criticism that the Party was not sufficiently mindful of local conditions when it implemented policy, Seypidin was defensive, stating that such accommodations could not run counter to Marxist-Leninist principles. Faced with comments that local leadership was overwhelmingly Han, he countered that leaders were selected on the basis of their revolutionary credentials and that the Han leaders in Xinjiang were simply the best suited for their jobs. Non-Han cadres could not be given positions solely on the basis of their *minzu* affiliation. They required training in order to ensure they were of the highest caliber.

Against the backdrop of these criticisms, the Anti-Rightist Campaign in Xinjiang was manifest primarily as a campaign against local nationalists. Particularly alarming for the central policymakers was the fact that criticisms came not only from intellectuals on the margins, but also from non-Han cadres within the Party core. Governor Wang Enmao 王恩茂 revealed that some of these Party members under interrogation had admitted secretly favoring the return of an independent Eastern Turkistan Republic. At least two of Seypidin Ezizi's former comrades from the Eastern Turkistan People's Revolutionary Party Central Committee, Muhemmet'imin Iminof and Es'et Is'haqof, were among the more than 1,600 cadres who were singled out during this period. These individuals were sentenced to reform-through-labor camps; while Iminof and Is'haqof were relatively lucky and were released after the conclusion of the Great Leap Forward, many others would not be free again until after 1976, the final year of the Cultural Revolution era.¹⁶⁷

With these heavy-handed responses to challenges from its indigenous detractors in Xinjiang, the Chinese Communist Party trapped itself. It had sought to demonstrate to local populations that it represented a break from nearly a century of failed Chinese attempts at governing the region. If it could have maintained its initial restraint, even in the face of these dissenters, this pursuit might have ultimately proven fruitful. When it resorted to arrests and mass surveillance, however, the CCP proved itself to be little better than Sheng Shicai had been. In the face of an increasingly paranoid environment, people might feel less inclined to act in open opposition, but would be driven underground to sabotage the state. Disastrous policies such as the Great Leap Forward, moreover, would further provoke popular ire. This ambitious attempt to propel China to greatness using little more than Communist

¹⁶⁷ See McMillen (1979), p. 92-94. See also Millward (2007), p. 258.

ideology and sheer willpower had the same detrimental effects in Xinjiang that it did elsewhere in China. Conservative estimates indicate that tens of thousands – and by most accounts, many magnitudes more – in the region starved when grain was prioritized for export rather than for domestic consumption. Livestock numbers in pastoral areas declined precipitously. Campaigns against rightists intensified, while the state adopted increasingly aggressive regulations against the practice of religion.¹⁶⁸ Ma Dazheng reports five instances of anti-government disturbance in Xinjiang during the period of the Great Leap Forward (1958-1961), all of which transpired in mid to late 1958. Insurrections in Koktokay (*Fuyun* 富蕴) County, the backing of which were attributed to the United States, reportedly lasted nearly a full year, leading into 1959.¹⁶⁹

From available materials, it appears that unrest related to the Islamic Government of Eastern Turkistan in Hoten did not continue past 1957. Still, in 1959, Xinjiang's Republican governor-in-exile Yolwas (*Yaoleboshi* 尧乐博士),¹⁷⁰ citing the testimony of a participant who had fled to Pakistan, reported to the Taipei desk of Agence France-Press that an additional incident had transpired in Hoten that year. According to the story, on March 20, a force of ten thousand Uyghur youth attacked and occupied a prison, killing fifty communist officials and freeing six hundred prisoners. The news article relates these events to contemporaneous developments in neighboring Tibet, from which the Dalai Lama fled during that same month. The French source reports that the rebellion lasted for six days before being

¹⁶⁸ See Millward (2007), p. 260-261. See also Benson and Svanberg (1998), pp. 136-137.

¹⁶⁹ See Ma Dazheng 马大正 (2003), p. 32-33.

¹⁷⁰ The Uyghur name *Yolwas*, meaning “tiger,” was a corruption of the name “Yolda Bars,” meaning “found on the streets.” Over time, “Yolda Bars” evolved into “Yolwas,” although most English language sources continue to refer to Yolwas as “Yolbars” or “Yulbars.” See Iminop Elaxun, “Yolwas qandaq adem?” (What Kind of Man Was Yolwas?), *Shinjang tarix matëriyalliri* (Xinjiang Historical Materials), No. 13 (Urumqi: Shinjang xelq neshriyati, 1984), pp. 155-156.

squelched by troops arriving from Urumqi.¹⁷¹ On the same incident, Donald McMillen differs somewhat, citing an unnamed source to suggest the occupation of the prison was “prolonged by Soviet support” and “presumably lasted for two months.”¹⁷² If these divergent details are accurate, they would suggest that, as relations between China and Soviet Union soured, the Soviets were taking a renewed interest in independence movements that were active in Xinjiang.

Without external support, the odds were considerably against the success of the Great Turkist Islamic Party and the Islamic Government of Eastern Turkistan. Because of its popularity within military circles, the former had some advanced weaponry but lacked organizational finesse. The latter was more carefully planned and organized, but rebels were arming themselves with clubs, axes, and spears. With the benefit of Soviet backing, either one of those movements could have posed a more significant threat to the Chinese presence in Xinjiang. Before the Great Leap Forward, however, it was unthinkable that the Soviet Union would ever undermine its ally and neighbor in such a manner. The superpower was not shy in assisting national liberation movements abroad, but there was no precedent for intervening in a place like the People’s Republic of China, a fellow member of the global communist community. Still, China’s leadership was being increasingly intransigent, and the Soviets recognized that that country was particularly vulnerable in Xinjiang. If Khrushchev wanted to bully Mao into reconsidering his confrontational postures, the Soviet leader knew

¹⁷¹ See “Une révolte aurait été étouffée au Sinkiang en mars dernier” (A Revolt in Xinjiang Was Reportedly Stifled in March), *Le Monde* (9 June 1959), http://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/1959/06/09/chine-une-revolte-auroit-ete-etouffee-au-sinkiang-en-mars-dernier_3057695_1819218.html (Accessed 6 February 2017).

¹⁷² See McMillen (1979), p. 119. In discussing the incident, McMillen cites George N. Patterson, *The Unquiet Frontier: Border Tensions in the Sino-Soviet Conflict* (Hong Kong: International Studies Group, 1966), p. 102. Patterson, however, does not indicate any duration for the uprising, nor does he suggest Soviet involvement. Patterson’s aforementioned source article in *Le Monde*, meanwhile, states that the uprising lasted for six days. The sentence in McMillen that introduces the differing information begins with “according to one source.” It appears likely that this source would have been an anonymous human informant.

precisely where he could strike. Prior to China's liberation, Stalin had already not-so-subtly wielded his hand in Xinjiang to exact policy concessions at both the local and national levels. Now, however, that notion was considerably more controversial. Beyond the fact that China was now the world's most populous communist state, Khrushchev had no interest in following in the footsteps of his predecessor, whose excesses he had criticized time and again. Moreover, some of his differences with Chairman Mao had arisen on the basis of the Chinese leader's recklessly aggressive foreign policy views. Mao seemed almost eager to engage in armed conflicts and could not understand Khrushchev's more cooperative stances vis-à-vis the United States. For him to adopt a confrontational approach to communist China in Xinjiang while simultaneously criticizing Mao's provocations against non-communist states would seem both counterproductive and hypocritical.

Still, there were less confrontational means by which Moscow could exploit China's perceived weakness in Xinjiang and send a clear message to Beijing. The same dissatisfaction and desperation that might lead people into armed revolt could also lead them to flee to seek safety abroad. In the first half of 1962, conservatively tens of thousands of Turki residents from border areas in the Ili and Tarbagatai Districts fled across the Soviet border into Kazakhstan to find relief from famine, oppression, and official incompetence at home. Among their ranks were many intellectuals and military veterans who had favored the Soviet-backed Eastern Turkistan Republic, including Tatar General Zunun Tëyipof (*Zunong Taiyefu* 祖农·太也夫), Vice Chief of Staff in the Xinjiang Military District and one of the highest-ranked non-Han PLA officers in the region at the time.¹⁷³ These people in particular had good reason for their escape: given the state of Sino-Soviet relations, it was only a

¹⁷³ See McMillen (1979), p. 50. See also Harrison E. Salisbury, "Marco Polo Would Recognize Mao's Sinkiang," *The New York Times*, 23 Nov 1969: SM14.

matter of time before those accused of being too close to the Soviets would meet the same fate as the “rightists” during the Great Leap Forward. This large-scale migration did not happen entirely by chance. According to Chinese sources, it was an intentional provocation orchestrated by the Soviets out of their consulate in Ghulja. Beyond merely encouraging defection, they also provided documentation to ease movement across the border, such as birth certificates and letters of invitation.¹⁷⁴ The mere fact that the Soviets accommodated the flow of traffic, however, should not be interpreted to mean that individuals did not move by their own free will. The problems that they were escaping in Xinjiang were real. After nearly a century of Chinese rule in their homeland, there was no reason to believe that things were going to get better now. In fact, during the Great Leap Forward, things had only gotten worse. In late May of 1962, the local Ili party committee halted sales of bus tickets across the border. Tensions flared as a growing crowd gathered to demand passage into Kazakhstan. In response, local militia and public security rushed to the scene, and the crowd descended into riots. Inevitably, police fired into the crowd, allegedly killing two.¹⁷⁵

During a June 8 meeting with Soviet Ambassador Stepan Chervonenko in Beijing, Chinese Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs Zhang Hanfu 章汉夫 expressed his government’s exasperation regarding this exodus of its citizens. Zhang reminded his counterpart that the Soviets had an obligation to repatriate those who had crossed illegally, while Chervonenko stressed the role that the Chinese government itself must take in resolving the situation. If they wanted so badly to retrieve their errant citizens, then they should dispatch troops into Soviet territory and take them back themselves.¹⁷⁶ The ability of the Soviet Union to entice

¹⁷⁴ See Ma Dazheng 马大正 (2003), pp. 40-41.

¹⁷⁵ See Ma Dazheng 马大正 (2003), p. 41-42. See also Li Sheng (2006), pp. 268-269, McMillen (1979), pp. 122-123, Benson and Svanberg (1998), p. 104, and Millward (2007), pp. 263-265.

¹⁷⁶ See “Minutes of the Meeting between Vice Minister Zhang Hanfu and the Ambassador of the Soviet Union to China Chervonenko,” June 8, 1962, *History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive*, PRC FMA 118-01765-03,

Chinese citizens, particularly intellectual and military figures, to their side served as more than a mere propaganda victory. While Khrushchev ruled out the possibility of direct and formal Soviet interference in the domestic affairs of its wayward ally, the refugees from Xinjiang had the potential of forming a core of resistance from within. They were a motivated force with intimate knowledge of the region, legitimate grievances, and connections to dissident networks throughout. These were people who could transmit propaganda in the local vernacular and, in the case of a military invasion, would be viewed as national liberators rather than foreign invaders. On the heels of the great exodus of 1962, the Soviet Union was forced to shutter its Ghulja consulate. Nonetheless, at the same time, public radio in Almaty and Tashkent began transmitting Uyghur-language broadcasts into Xinjiang, indicting the Chinese regime for its insensitivity towards the interests of Turkis and Muslims.¹⁷⁷

More vexing still for authorities in Xinjiang was the emergence in 1962 of the underground Uyghur-language “Homeland Rescue Radio” (*Weten qutquzush radiosı*), which began broadcasting from a mobile radio transmitter in the western mountains, its operators moving about the border areas to elude detection. Chinese security forces replied to this development with the arrests of Uyghur youths and intellectuals, but were unable to find the culprits to stop the flow of information.¹⁷⁸ The effects of such focused propaganda on Xinjiang’s non-Han residents cannot be overstated. Here was a relatable voice that spoke to their real-life frustrations. The mere fact that Chinese propagandists repeatedly told them that their homeland had always been a part of China did not make those words true. Nearly

24-26 (Translated by 7Brands), <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/118200> (accessed 2 Feb 2016).

¹⁷⁷ See Stanley Karnow, “Old China-Russia Feud Erupts,” *Washington Post* (18 Sep. 1968): A18. See also Abdurreshid Haji Kërimi (2006), p. 71.

¹⁷⁸ See Ablikim Baqi Iltebir, *Sherqi türkistan qollanmisi* (The Eastern Turkistan Handbook) (Istanbul: Sherqi türkistan weqqi tetqiqat merkizi, 1999), pp.147-148. See also Abdurreshid Haji Kërimi (2007), p. 71.

a century after the beginnings of the Muslim Rebellion that had harkened Yaqub Beg's Kashgarian Emirate, the Chinese state still failed to present a compelling case as to why Xinjiang's non-Han natives should identify as Chinese. What benefits had they accrued under Chinese rule? How were they invested collectively in the success of a regime from which so many felt alienated and distant? For the disaffected, there was a clear sense that the history of the Eastern Turkistan Republic had not fully run its course, and that the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region would not be the terminal destination in their struggle. For some true believers, the Sino-Soviet split and the resurgence of Soviet interest in Xinjiang affairs spelt a reversal of fortunes for their frustrated movement towards a true national liberation.

With this, the center of foreign-based activity related to Eastern Turkistan shifted from Turkey to Soviet Central Asia. Whereas Isa Yusuf Alptekin and Muhemmed Imin Bughra had previously provided the ideological foundations of Eastern Turki resistance to the Chinese state, now that role was being filled increasingly by Soviet-based refugee intellectuals. In early 1962, Ghulja native Ghëni Batur (*Aini Abudula* 艾尼·阿不都拉), a Uyghur military hero of the Three Districts Revolution who had fled Xinjiang in late 1956, summoned a gathering of some of his most prominent former Eastern Turki comrades, including author Ziya Semedi (*Ziya Saimaidi* 孜亚·赛麦迪), General Zunun Tëyipof and Hashir Wahidi (*Haxi'er Wabeidi* 哈希尔·瓦黑地), to his home in Kazakhstan to discuss a course of action. "The Uyghur people trained and mentored prominent figures such as yourselves," Batur is purported to have said, "All of you have a pen. Write a letter to that blue-eye [Khrushchev] in Moscow. In the past, not realizing the nature of the Chinese, Moscow was deceived and gave our country away, but now they seem to understand. Now let's help. We absolutely must free ourselves from the yoke of the Chinese and live in our

own state.” In response to this plea, Hashir Wahidi penned an impassioned letter to Khrushchev, signed by all in attendance and dated on April 29, 1962. He followed up on this letter in October of 1963 with a second, pleading that “the people of Xinjiang no longer wish to be a part of China, but want to build socialism on their own. It must be rid of oppression.” The Soviet Center remained unmoved on the pursuance of these aims, and moreover sternly chastised the independence activists, urging restraint. Nonetheless, authorities tacitly allowed refugee agitators to ruminate on and foster these ideas.¹⁷⁹

Ziya Semedi and Zunun Tëyipof similarly responded to Ghëni Batur’s call for action. In the cultural sphere, the former founded and headed the “Committee for the Liberation of Eastern Turkistan” in 1963. That same year, General Tëyipof organized the “Turkistan Liberation Army,” a force that was purported to consist of some fifty to sixty thousand troops.¹⁸⁰ The formidable strength of the refugee army was flaunted in Soviet propaganda, both as a carrot to discontented Xinjiang locals unsure of the likelihood that an anti-Chinese movement could succeed and as a stick to Beijing, a reminder to the Chinese government just how vulnerable it was on the periphery. In his 1979 book *The Coming Decline of the Chinese Empire*, Soviet propagandist Victor Louis spoke with insincerity about the challenge his country faced in reining in the ambitions of Turki refugees who “are rearing to go back to China and take part in the armed struggle against the Chinese. It has required a considerable effort on the part of the Soviet authorities to restrain them from undesirable excesses.” As a distraction from direct fighting, Louis claims, they have been put to military training. But, he continues, “How much longer will the Russians be able to hold these forces in check? For when, sooner or later, they break loose, the outcome will amount to much more than simply

¹⁷⁹ See Xodžamberdi (2008), pp. 622-623.

¹⁸⁰ See Harrison E. Salisbury, “A ‘Free’ Sinkiang Held Soviet Aim,” *The New York Times* (2 March 1970): L7. See also Victor Louis, *The Coming Decline of the Chinese Empire* (New York: Times Books, 1979), p. 92.

the beginning of an insurrection in Eastern Turkestan.”¹⁸¹ Taunting aside, all of these developments remained under the watchful eye of Soviet minders, but they were not the products of the KGB. They marked the efforts of Xinjiang natives who were willing to fight to resurrect their cause for self-determination and were lobbying Moscow to take an active role in that pursuit.

Yet for the Soviets, the discontented Chinese citizens living on their territory were little more than bargaining chips. The idea that the communist superpower would at this point go to war over the issue of their independence was, as Kazakhstani Uyghur historian Qehriman Ghojamberdi puts it, “rooted in political naïveté” on the part of the Turki elite. “[Activists] held the exaggerated and oversimplistic view that the Soviet Union would take major steps to support a national liberation movement in Uyghurstan. In practice, however, it was the opposite.”¹⁸² Indeed, the Soviets were somewhat duplicitous in their dealings with the refugees under their charge. On the one hand, they spoke using the language of struggle and “national liberation,” but on the other, they were seeking peaceful resolutions to their differences with Beijing. As such, Soviet clandestine services were tasked with the limited goal of destabilizing Xinjiang, but not a mission of liberation. In a 2002 interview, former Soviet military intelligence officer Vladimir Sidirov acknowledged that “under special orders from the Politburo of the [Communist Party of the Soviet Union], the intelligence agencies engaged in an operation to undermine the situation in [Xinjiang].”¹⁸³ After the various purges of the Great Leap Forward, and with the closing of Xinjiang-based Soviet embassies, however, its intelligence network in the region had been eviscerated. To succeed in their task, they would increasingly need to rely on a combination of clandestine cross-border

¹⁸¹ See Louis (1979), pp. 91-92.

¹⁸² See Xodžamberdi (2008), pp. 623-624.

¹⁸³ See Xodžamberdi (2008), p. 625.

intelligence missions and the cooperation of indigenous Turkis. For the former, KGB and military intelligence quarters were established in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan, with actions coordinated from a command center in Almaty. One spy described his personal tasks in the area thusly: “in making contact with community heads and rural commune leaders to learn of the sociopolitical situation in the Chinese border areas, visual reconnaissance directed division movement.”¹⁸⁴

XIP Origin Stories

Beyond direct espionage, the goal of subverting the situation in Xinjiang would require collaboration of non-Han Xinjiangers who were still living on the Chinese side of the border. Wittingly or not, the latter incarnation of the Eastern Turkistan People’s Revolutionary Party would fill that role. Unbeknownst to true believers in the cause for independence, destabilizing Xinjiang appears to have been the extent of their use to the Soviets. The success or failure of their movement was of little consequence to Soviet strategy as long as they conveyed a message to Beijing. Qehriman Ghojamberdi writes, “In this way, Moscow once again shamelessly took advantage of the legitimate aspirations of Uyghurs for independence.”¹⁸⁵ Would the party have existed, however, absent Soviet backing?

The People’s Revolutionary Party differed from the Great Turkist Islamic Party and Islamic Government of Eastern Turkistan before it in that it was an organization founded by people who had been willing to give autonomy a chance, but were disillusioned with the system. There were three primary currents in Xinjiang that played some role in XIP’s

¹⁸⁴ See Xodžamberdi (2008), p. 625.

¹⁸⁵ See Xodžamberdi (2008), p. 625.

renaissance. First, it represented the continuation of an unbroken desire for independence that pre-dated liberation. Second, it was a reaction against perceived disappointments, misrule, and abuses of power that were perpetrated under the Chinese communist system of the Mao era. Third, it was a response to Soviet encouragement and provocations. Each of these respective currents is manifest in the stories historians tell regarding the origins of the People's Revolutionary Party. Different sources, however, tend to cleave to one or another primary narrative, and as a result, the stories behind the party's inception can vary significantly. For instance, by one telling, the clandestine party of the Three Districts Revolution and the clandestine party of the Cultural Revolution were one in the same. It never fully ceased operation, but rather returned to the underground during the Mao era, from where it worked continuously to undermine Chinese rule in Xinjiang. Other accounts suggest that it reemerged in Xinjiang at later crucial moments, in response to developments on the domestic and international stage. Some of these indicate that it formed as an immediate backlash to the formation of the autonomous region in 1955, to the Great Leap Forward, to the 1962 border exodus, and to the onset of the Cultural Revolution.

Clearly, each historical interpretation of the party's origins serves different political interests. While it is uncertain which of these origin stories hews closest to reality, it is worth looking at the details of each of the prevailing narratives to see what can be gleaned. In his *Eastern Turkistan Handbook*, Ablikim Baqi Iltebir suggests that the XIP remained continuously active from its founding on December 7, 1945 through the Cultural Revolution. In March of 1951, the People's Revolutionary Party hosted a convention in Ghulja where 51 intellectuals gathered to demand independence from the Chinese.¹⁸⁶ Chinese historian Zhu

¹⁸⁶ See Ablikim Baqi Iltebir (1999), p. 143.

Peimin 朱培民 too references this meeting, but neither mentions XIP's involvement nor suggests that attendees sought outright independence. Rather, according to Zhu, the gathering sought the establishment of a federated Eastern Turkistan Republic, on the lines of Soviet republics.¹⁸⁷ Iltebir further credits XIP for instigating uprisings in Yëngisar in June 1955, in Ulughchat (*Wuqia* 乌恰) in August 1955, and in Urumqi in February 1956.¹⁸⁸ I have not yet found reference to these incidents from additional sources. Iltebir continues that party leaders Sultan Mahmut, Ili Qurban (*Aili Ku'erban* 艾力·库爾班), and Sëyit Batur (*Seyiti Hamuti* 色衣提·哈木提) were the masterminds behind a peasant uprising in Hami in October of 1958, an incident that historian Ma Dazheng attributes to sympathizers of Osman Batur, the United States, and Chiang Kai-shek.¹⁸⁹ According to Iltebir, XIP was directly responsible for the skirmish with Chinese troops that erupted in Ghulja after the border was closed in late May of 1962.¹⁹⁰ In short, the Party remained relevant and played a hand in a continual string of incidents from the Three Districts Revolution through the Cultural Revolution.

In the 1996 report printed in his 2003 book *The National Interest Above All Else*, Ma Dazheng claims that in 1956, the Soviet Uyghur Tursun Rakhimov (*Tu'ercun Rehemoju* 吐尔逊·热合莫夫) planted the seeds for the Eastern Turkistan People's Revolutionary Party in Xinjiang. Ma bases this assertion on the results of a 1973 investigation by Chinese security services into the party's origins.¹⁹¹ Rakhimov, a historian who worked for the Soviet Communist Party's Central Committee, was through much of the Sino-Soviet split a prolific

¹⁸⁷ See Zhu Peimin 朱培民 (2000), p. 335.

¹⁸⁸ See Ablikim Baqi Iltebir (1999), pp. 144-145.

¹⁸⁹ See Ablikim Baqi Iltebir (1999), p. 146. See also Ma Dazheng 马大正 (2003), pp. 33, 36.

¹⁹⁰ See Ablikim Baqi Iltebir (1999), p. 147.

¹⁹¹ See Ma Dazheng 马大正 (2003), p. 42.

writer of academic Uyghur nationalist literature.¹⁹² In his capacity as a Soviet specialist, he established a connection with Abdulla Zakirof, vice-chairman of the autonomous region's people's government and a founding member of the original People's Revolutionary Party. Rakhimov allegedly directed Zakirof, "struggle tirelessly to establish a Uyghur Republic in order to lay the seeds to realize Xinjiang independence." In 1960, the Soviet embassy followed up on this initial contact with a four-part plan to guide the founding of a new Eastern Turkistan People's Revolutionary Party: "Don't worry about internal differences. Strengthen unity. Establish an organization. Form two teams that employ two kinds of leadership struggle, one behind the scenes and one in the open."¹⁹³ In the ensuing years, Zakirof developed an expansive organizational network that included fellow people's government vice-chairmen Muhemmet'imin Iminof (also a founding member of the original XIP) and Patiqa Sugurbayow (*Patihan* 帕提汗), under the organizational scheming of Regional Press Uyghur Language Director Toxti Qurban (*Tuohuti Ku'erban* 托乎提·库尔班) and others. With the start of the Cultural Revolution in 1966, the time had arrived to formalize the fledgling organization, and in 1968, a restored XIP was established.¹⁹⁴ Thus, Ma's first account accuses the Soviets of establishing a sleeper cell in Xinjiang even before Sino-Soviet relations had suffered any significant damage.

In Ma's second telling, a 2006 collaboration with fellow researcher Xu Jianying 许建英, however, the Soviet role in the founding of the Eastern Turkistan People's Revolutionary Party is not so pronounced. There is no mention of Tursun Rakhimov's contact with Abdulla Zakirof nor any reference at all to the involvement of either Zakirof or

¹⁹² See Kamalov (2007), pp. 38-39.

¹⁹³ See Ma Dazheng 马大正 (2003), pp. 42-43.

¹⁹⁴ See Ma Dazheng 马大正 (2003), p. 43.

Muhammet'imin Iminof in the movement. In this version, Soviet-influenced separatists have remained embedded in all levels of Xinjiang society since Liberation. After the Chinese crackdown on border crossings in Ghulja in 1962, they realized that if they truly wanted an independent state, they would need to create a well-organized and committed revolutionary party with clearly stated political guidelines and a scope covering the whole of Xinjiang. At that point, the timing was not right, however. Rather, they bided their time building networks and planning the details of this future movement. In the years leading to the Cultural Revolution, these separatists banded together into two primary organizations, the Urumqi-based “Eastern Turkistan Independence Struggle League” (*Sherqiy türkistan musteqilliq kürishi ittifaqi*/Chinese: *Dong tujuesitan duli douzheng tongmeng* 东突厥斯坦斗争同盟) and the Kashgar-based “Eastern Turkistan Youth Homeland Salvation Army” (*Sherqiy türkistan yashlar weten qutquzush armiyisi*/Chinese: *Dong tujuesitan qingnian jinguo jun* 东突厥斯坦青年救国军).¹⁹⁵ The Cultural Revolution was just the opportunity that the separatists had anticipated. Under the leadership of Toxti Qurban, the “Uyghurstan People’s Revolutionary Party” was founded in 1967, with branches in Urumqi and Kashgar. The party, however, changed its name in February 1968 to the “Eastern Turkistan People’s Revolutionary Party.” Ma and Xu explain the name change thus:

In order to confuse the reference and deceive the masses, it changed its name to match the People’s Revolutionary Party of the Three Districts Revolution era. At the same time, in order to conform to Xinjiang’s two historical separatist regimes (the 1933 “Islamic Republic of Eastern Turkistan” and the 1944 “Eastern Turkistan Republic,” both founded on November 12), it falsely claimed that it had been founded on November 12, 1960.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁵ See Ma Dazheng 马大正 and Xu Jianying 许建英 (2006), p. 113. The Uyghur names for these organizations can be found in Li Shēng (2006), p. 655.

¹⁹⁶ See Ma Dazheng 马大正 and Xu Jianying 许建英 (2006), p. 114.

Toxti Qurban was Chairman of XIP's Central Committee, which drafted a sophisticated organizational structure, constitution, and party platform with the guiding principal being, in Qurban's words, "to realize independence with the assistance of the Soviet Union and to establish an 'Eastern Turkistan Republic.'"¹⁹⁷ In comparison with his earlier accounting, this version frames partisans as acting with relatively more autonomy and less guidance from abroad.

Qehriman Ghojamberdi provides a fourth take on the founding of XIP's latter incarnation, based on the accounts and memoirs of a number of its veterans, including party leaders Sabit Abduraxman and Exmet Egemberdi. At the beginning of the 1960s, Ghojamberdi reports, former leaders from the Eastern Turkistan Republic, from the League for the Preservation of Peace and Democracy in Xinjiang, and from the former Eastern Turkistan People's Revolutionary Party agreed that the time was ripe to pursue a Uyghur national liberation struggle. After all, the Chinese government was mired in infighting, people were growing fatigued with the chaotic political campaigns being pursued by the ruling regime, and now the Soviet Union and China were increasingly at odds with one another. XIP began its activities on the mistaken belief that the conflict would result in war, and that the Soviets in that case would certainly support a Uyghur national liberation movement. The party was secretly founded in Urumqi in 1962 under the leadership of Muhemmet'imin Iminof, who used his experience in the party's namesake to direct the new party's organization and guiding documents. In order to safeguard its secrecy, the party was referred to only by its acronym XIP, and local branches were given distinct code names. The party thus went by as many as nine different names. The diffuse nature of its nomenclature and the secrecy involved, Ghojamberdi proposes, are part of the reason that

¹⁹⁷ See Ma Dazheng 马大正 and Xu Jianying 许建英 (2006), p. 114.

Chinese sources have such difficulty putting together the various pieces to form a cogent narrative of who the party was and what really happened. Its 25-member Central Committee included Toxti Qurban, Patiqa Sugurbayow, and three founding members of the former XIP: Iminof, Es'et Is'haqof, and Abdulla Zakirof.¹⁹⁸ This account proposes that the party was founded in 1962, under the leadership and on the model of its previous incarnation.

Unsurprisingly, these historians are also at odds regarding just how the ranks of party members grew after the organization was founded. Iltebir asserts that at its peak, XIP had a membership of sixty thousand. While he does not comment directly on how it organized and grew to such a number, he implies that its strong leadership, strict party discipline, and clearly stated objectives all played significant roles.¹⁹⁹ The single greatest factor fueling its mobilization, however, was the violent excess of the Cultural Revolution. Attacks on Islam and on non-Han cultural traditions drew large swaths of people to seek an outlet through which to fight back.²⁰⁰ Ghojamberdi concurs on these points, and specifically credits Muhemmet'imin Iminof, whom he describes as a “a careful man of considerable talent,” and who “acting in deep cover in the midst of the ‘Cultural Revolution,’ was able to rally a large group to step up resistance to the colonial regime and establish links with relevant Soviet authorities.”²⁰¹ Both Iltebir and Ghojamberdi suggest that institutional relationships within the Chinese communist structure also played some role in the party’s growth. These connections were fostered not only through formal government channels, moreover, but also informally through Xinjiang’s prison system, which during the Great Leap Forward was inundated with local officials who were deemed to be political “rightists,” including future

¹⁹⁸ See Xodžamberdi (2008), pp. 630-631.

¹⁹⁹ See Ablikim Baqi Iltebir (1999), p. 141.

²⁰⁰ See Ablikim Baqi Iltebir (1999), pp. 148-149.

²⁰¹ See Xodžamberdi (2008), p. 632.

XIP leaders Iminof, Zakirof, and Is’haqof. The majority of political prisoners such as this would have been consigned to “reform through labor” camps, wherein they would receive ideological reeducation while simultaneously working long hours on a state-run farm. This oppressive environment nonetheless was conducive to allowing prisoners to forge connections with both likeminded political prisoners and more conventional offenders from every corner of Xinjiang. It is quite possible that initial planning for a resurgent People’s Revolutionary Party would have been conceived from within these state farms. Illustrating this point was XIP’s alleged role in an August 1965 prison uprising at the Pailou Reform through Labor Camp (*Peylo emgek bilen özgertish meydani* / *Pailou laogai nongchang* 牌楼劳改农场) near Yarkant, a part of Kashgar’s prison system. Ghojamberdi and Iltebir claim that three hundred members of the XIP-affiliated “Storm Party” (*Boran partiyisi*) overtook their guards and captured the whole of the farm. They were able to maintain control of the prison for seven days before the PLA came to suppress the mutiny.²⁰² This incident does not appear in the PRC resources that I have consulted.

While Ma Dazheng acknowledges the administrative finesse of XIP’s leaders, he primarily explains the party’s growth as having been achieved through “deceptive and coercive methods.” He explains that “they claimed that the ‘Eastern Turkistan People’s Revolutionary Party’ had 23 years of history, borrowing that legacy in order to give the masses a false air of its legitimacy. They took advantage of every kind of social and organizational relation in order to secretly cultivate party members.” On these points, the details reflect some of the views presented also by his Uyghur counterparts. Beyond this, however, Ma states, “They even used threats of violence, threatening that if people did not

²⁰² See Xodžamberdi (2008), p. 633. See also Iltebir (1999), p. 148. In Abdurreshid Haji Kërimi (2006), pp. 247-249, the author too mentions this “Storm Party” and its ties with XIP’s leadership.

participate in the organization, then they would be beheaded or their property confiscated. At the same time, they began offering political enticements and the lure of money, in order to seduce discontented and down-on-their-luck people into participating in their organization.” In contrast to the lofty membership numbers offered by Iltebir and Ghojamberdi, Ma suggests that the party at its height had a much more modest membership of 1552.²⁰³

Weighing each origin story against one another, we can draw certain conclusions. First of all, Ablikim Baqi Iltebir’s account of a continuously active People’s Revolutionary Party appears to be an outlier when compared to the alternative narratives. Even Qehriman Ghojamberdi, who credits Iltebir as one of his sources, appears to dismiss this notion. On a personal level, the author of the *Eastern Turkistan Handbook* is a party veteran and possesses a wealth of knowledge on the subject. At the same time, if the party did indeed, as Ma Dazheng suggests, feed its recruits a lie in order to piggyback on the legitimacy of the earlier Eastern Turkistan People’s Revolutionary Party, then by extension, it is possible that that was the story that Iltebir himself was given. It may be true, but this opinion is in the minority here. Abdulla Zakirof might have had contact with Tursun Rakhimov in 1956 as laid out by Ma Dazheng in his earlier source, but it is questionable the extent to which that alleged meeting is significant to the later founding of the People’s Revolutionary Party. Separatists throughout Xinjiang were almost certainly organizing into sophisticated leftist underground groups as early as 1962, although it is unclear whether or not they were yet employing the XIP name. On this point, however, Ghojamberdi presents a reasonable, sourced explanation for the seeming lack of uniformity in name during this early period. Uyghur translator Toxti Qurban was most likely in the party leadership, and was very likely

²⁰³ See Ma Dazheng 马大正 and Xu Jianying 许建英 (2006), p. 115.

joined by Patiqa Sugurbayow, Muhemmet'imin Iminof, Abdulla Zakirof, and possibly Es'et Is'haqof. In this way, XIP was a reflection of its namesake. Many of its most prominent leaders were simultaneously high-ranking officials in Xinjiang's Chinese administration. They used their public positions as covers while clandestinely working to build their underground network and to organize a credible party structure. If Ghojamberdi's account is accurate, moreover, the fact that the party leaders used coded language to mask their subversive activities too echoes a precedent set by their predecessor. One significant difference between the former and latter incarnations of the People's Revolutionary Party, however, was the quality of leadership that was involved. When the XIP Central Committee under Abdukërim Abbasof met for the first time in 1945, its leadership was young and inexperienced. Now, nearly two decades later, these same people were seasoned statesmen. Organizationally, this party was founded upon sophistication and experience unparalleled in Xinjiang's separatist circles before and since. One final point that can be gleaned from these varied origin stories is the fact that the chaos of the Cultural Revolution provided fertile grounds for XIP to act.

FOUR

The Cultural Revolution Unleashed in Xinjiang

On the surface, the “Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution” in Xinjiang played out much like anywhere else in China. With a cursory glance at existing written histories on the subject, the reader is introduced to stories of Red Guard factions, power struggles, and beleaguered local party apparatuses. Violence, destruction, anarchy, and injustice are common themes. Yet given its demographics and the historical nature of its relationship to China, Xinjiang is not just a place like any other. Underlying this told history is another that is largely untold, a history that had the potential to topple Chinese governance in the region and to hand the Eastern Turkistan People’s Revolutionary Party an independent state.

In late 1965, Shanghai literary critic Yao Wen Yuan 姚文元, under orders from a far left faction headed by Mao’s wife Jiang Qing 江青, penned a blistering critique of the play *Hai Rui Dismissed from Office* (*Hai Rui Ba Guan* 海瑞罢官). Written by Beijing University historian Wu Han 吴晗 in 1961, the work tells of a Ming Dynasty official who is punished for daring to confront the emperor with an honest but inconvenient critique of the state of things in the Empire. Mao originally liked the play, but on the eve of the Cultural Revolution, Mao’s allies on the radical left reinterpreted it as a veiled criticism of the chairman. It had been written shortly after Minister of Defense Peng Dehuai 彭德怀, like the play’s titular character Hai Rui, had similarly entreated Mao to open his eyes to the disaster that was the Great Leap Forward. For his brazen honesty, Peng had been humiliated and stripped of title. Now, Wu Han’s sympathetic portrayal of Hai Rui would serve as a pretense for a criticism campaign against him. The source of the author’s misguided ideology, discourse of the day argued, lay in the corrupting influence of the “black

line of the bourgeoisie,” with the color “black” here being used to signify something nefarious or dark.²⁰⁴

Like every other newspaper in the country, the *Xinjiang Daily* responded to this unfolding scandal through a series of articles and editorials that were intended to explain the problem and to educate the public on how to conduct a proper criticism. Xinjiang’s regional government did its part in the revolutionary cause by manufacturing outrage against Wu Han and an ever-expanding cast of supporting characters who were mostly Beijing intellectuals. Yet there was a palpable disconnect between Beijing’s intellectual circles and distant Xinjiang. Did Wu Han and his associates have any real relevance in China’s far west? This was a question that Chairman Mao began addressing at an expanded meeting of the Politburo in Beijing from May 4 to 26, 1966. Attacks on intellectuals in the People’s Republic were by this point commonplace and unremarkable. These particular attacks, however, were proxies for someone higher, Wu Han’s superior and Beijing Mayor Peng Zhen 彭真.²⁰⁵ A political purge was starting that would affect high levels of the party bureaucracy. Mao’s infamous May 16 Notification, released in the midst of this highly charged political event, went further to suggest that cultural “venom” in fact pervaded every level of society in every corner of China.

A May 21 *Xinjiang Daily* editorial acknowledges this fact and brings a more local flavor to the campaign against Wu Han, stating,

We must be free to mobilize the masses to unmask and fight back against the anti-Party, anti-Mao Zedong Thought, and anti-socialist black lines within Xinjiang. The class struggle on the battle lines of ideology and culture in the autonomous region is extremely acute, complicated, and penetrating. It has

²⁰⁴ See Roderick MacFarquhar and Michael Schoenhals, *Mao’s Last Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), pp. 17-19.

²⁰⁵ See MacFarquhar and Schoenhals (2006), pp. 17-19.

not only the same bourgeois black line as the rest of the nation, but also has the black line of contemporary revisionism coming from the Soviet Union and the black line of bourgeois local nationalism.”²⁰⁶

Hence, “three black lines” were identified in Xinjiang. At the meeting in Beijing, Burhan Shehidi, former Xinjiang governor and a current vice-chair of the Politburo, was quietly identified as “the chief root of the three black lines in Xinjiang,” and was the region’s earliest victim of the purge that was unfolding.²⁰⁷ On May 25, Xinjiang’s regional party committee issued a notification calling for party organs at all levels to “earnestly uncover, expose, and criticize” representatives of the “three black lines” in their midsts. Two days later, it delivered the same message at a two-day meeting of revolutionary activists in Urumqi to train and mobilize the masses to identify and join the struggle against the “three black lines.”²⁰⁸ In response, a front page article in the June 15 issue of the *Xinjiang Daily* was penned by a certain “Cultural Vanguard” (*Wen Xianfeng* 文先锋), calling for readers to “thoroughly expose and criticize Wang Gulin’s anti-Party and anti-socialist crimes.” Wang Gulin 王谷林, the assistant editor of *Xinjiang Literature* magazine and the chief of the editorial staff at *Minzu Literature*, was Xinjiang’s first concrete local face to be specifically identified in the press for his influence from the “three black lines.”²⁰⁹

²⁰⁶ See “Gaoju mao zedong sixiang weida hongqi; guangfan shenru kaizhan shehuizhuyi wenhua da geming” 高举毛泽东思想伟大红旗；广泛深入开展社会主义文化大革命 (Raise High the Great Flag of Mao Zedong Thought; Thoroughly Carry Out the Great Socialist Cultural Revolution), *Xinjiang Ribao* 新疆日报 (21 May 1966): 1.

²⁰⁷ See Niu Qiyi 牛其益, interviewed by Chen Wuguo 陈伍国, “Shuang zhong se yu nong: wang enmao jiangjun zai “wenhua da geming” zhong de yixie jingli” 霜重色愈浓 – 王恩茂将军在“文化大革命”中的一些经历 (The White Is Strong and the Color More Deep: Some of General Wang Enmao’s Experiences in the “Cultural Revolution”) (21 June 2009), *Koushu lishi zaixian* 口述历史在线 http://chineseorallhistory.cn/E_ReadNews.asp?NewsID=52 (accessed 13 June 2011).

²⁰⁸ See Zhu Peimin 朱培民 (1999), p. 315. See also Dang Yulin 党育林 and Zhang Yuxi 张玉玺 (2003), pp. 241-242.

²⁰⁹ See Wen Xianfeng 文先锋, “Chedi jieli he pipan wang gulin de fan dang fan shehuizhuyi zuixing” 彻底揭露和批判王谷林的反党反社会主义罪行 (Thoroughly Expose and Criticize Wang Gulin’s Anti-Party and Anti-Socialist Crimes), *Xinjiang ribao* 新疆日报 (15 June 1966): 1-2.

In late May and early June, students calling themselves “red guards” at Beijing University and the High School attached to Qinghua University began posting big character posters critical of school administrators and Party committees. According to local officials, these were “counterrevolutionary” acts, but Mao sent an entirely different message through a June 2 *People’s Daily* editorial in which he praised the big character posters, inviting students in other institutions nationwide to follow suit. Basking in the Great Helmsman’s acclaim, each day the youth grew increasingly rancorous and even violent. Despite the appearance that this was a movement from the bottom up, it was in reality a carefully crafted top-down exercise, secretly planned by Mao’s inner circle within the Party leadership. Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping, out of the loop, were taken by surprise as everything unfolded. If Mao was going to give these youth his endorsement, they reasoned, their activities should at the very least be controlled and monitored. After first seeking the approval of the chairman, who was at the time on vacation, they issued a Central Committee directive calling for the dispatch of “work teams” to schools nationwide, in order keep check over the activists.²¹⁰ Almost as soon as the work teams were on the scenes, the pace of activity and news regarding the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution slowed to a crawl. This began a period referred to melodramatically as the “fifty days of white terror,” during which Chairman Mao later complained that the earnest desires of young revolutionaries to satisfy his directives were stifled by overbearing local authorities. Returning from vacation in late July, Mao immediately censured Deng and Liu and ordered the work teams withdrawn from the universities. This change in course was announced at a rally presided by Zhou Enlai, Deng, and Liu before ten thousand students and teachers at the Great Hall of the People on July

²¹⁰ See MacFarquhar and Schoenhals (2006), pp. 63-65.

29. All three leaders offered self-criticisms, explaining that they had ordered the work teams because they were “old revolutionaries encountering new problems.”²¹¹

Audio recordings from the July 29 rally arrived at Xinjiang University on the morning of August 4 and immediately caused a stir on the university campus. Students grew agitated and their anger unrestrained. By midday, they had started forcing their ways into academic buildings, offices, and staff apartments, dragging professors and administrators out into the university grounds for impromptu struggle sessions. According to witness Wang Lide 王力德, son of the late Hui author, educator, and social activist Wang Mengyang 王孟扬, “The whole campus was gripped with insanity. Nearly all cadres and teachers had been dragged out. Each student grabbing a teacher or cadre, the grounds were filled with criticisms and struggles. There was chaos in every direction.” Targets of the aggression were initially only made to wear tall paper hats, but the students very quickly decided that would not be enough, and started introducing new forms of humiliation and torture, forcing their victims to bow at the waist while standing on a wobbly stack of tables or making them run high speed laps around the perimeter of the grounds, arms locked with those of younger, more virile students.²¹²

Like many such events that occurred during this era, the *Xinjiang Daily* did not report on what happened during what came to be known as the “August Fourth Incident.” Regardless, through Wang’s account and another by former Xinjiang University Red Guard Aydar Bazil’baev, we are offered windows into the various victims of that day’s proceedings. “First and foremost was naturally an attack against university Vice-Chancellor Yun Guang

²¹¹ See MacFarquhar and Schoenhals (2006), pp. 81-85.

²¹² See Wang Lide 王力德, “Xinjiang di yi ci da guimo ‘dou heibang’” 新疆第一次大规模 “斗黑帮” (Xinjiang’s First Large-Scale “Black Gang Struggle”), *Xian yun ruo hai* 闲云若海 (9 December 2013) http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_53c57b9d0101ijze.html (Accessed 1 February 2016).

云光,” Wang starts, “who had kept control of the situation during the ‘fifty days of white terror.’” Yun was soon joined by fellow Vice-Chancellor Zhang Dongyue 张东月 and at least a hundred others, including at least one young female “reactionary student,” who after being tortured were lined up on the sports fields for a mass rally against them. Such rallies against the ever-swelling ranks of Xinjiang University’s “black gang” became a daily routine on campus through much of 1966.²¹³ Bazil’baev recalls a similar scene, but remembers differently just who were the primary targets of these rallies. He notes the names of prominent victims, including Uyghur Language and Literature Department head Memtimin Xudaberdi, his wife Shamshihan, University Provost Nusret Shehidi, and university Party Committee member Hajim Jappar.²¹⁴ In retrospect, he assesses that, “Everywhere, the same pattern revealed itself. Despite the fact that only a small minority of all cadres were from the non-Han nationalities, they accounted for over 90% of those labeled ‘evil spirits’ and ‘black gangs.’”²¹⁵

This perception that Uyghurs and other non-Han individuals were specifically singled out and victimized during Xinjiang’s Cultural Revolution is pervasive amongst accounts of the era published outside of China. “The purpose of the ‘Cultural Revolution’ in Uyghurstan,” writes Qehriman Ghojamberdi, “was, at the hands of students and young people – most of whom were ethnic Chinese – to crack down on local cadres, intellectuals, and clergy in order to open a path to accelerate the sinicization of the indigenous populations.”²¹⁶ Is this an accurate reflection of how the situation developed in Xinjiang? Indeed many non-Han individuals would be demoted, humiliated, and purged. Previously

²¹³ See Wang Lide 王力德 (2013).

²¹⁴ See Ajdar Bazil’baev, *Četyre goda v haose; o tak nazyvamoj ‘kul’turnoj revoljucii’ v sin’cziane* (Four Years in the Chaos: On the So-Called “Cultural Revolution” in Xinjiang) (Almaty, 1978), p. 33.

²¹⁵ See Bazil’baev (1978), p. 81.

²¹⁶ See Xodžamberdi (2008), p. 600.

admissible symbols of Uyghur and Muslim identities would be targeted and destroyed. Yet Hans too were demoted, humiliated, and purged. Previously admissible symbols of Han and other religious identities too were targeted and destroyed. The Cultural Revolution in Xinjiang was similarly damaging for one demographic as it was for the other. A perusal of articles and images in the *Xinjiang Daily* of the era – although admittedly a heavily filtered and limited reflection of reality – gives no indication that one ethnicity was favored or condemned over another, or that one's ethnic identity on its own was inherently a bad thing. In fact, it was during the ten years generally associated with the Cultural Revolution period that Uyghur Seypidin Ezizi would be promoted to become the first and still the only non-Han cadre to occupy the highly powerful post of first secretary in the regional Party committee. Furthermore, non-Hans were not solely passive victims of what transpired. As evidenced by several personal accounts of the era (Bazil'baev and Abdurreshid Haji Kërimi, to name two), non-Hans too participated in culturally destructive Red Guard and other rebel organizations – and as we will later see, this fact actually benefited the development of the People's Revolutionary Party.

Nonetheless, Xinjiang's demographic makeup, particularly in more provincial locations far from the capital, created an optic wherein non-Hans perceived a very real sense of victimhood. In cities such as Kashgar or Hoten, where non-Hans in 1966 constituted 92 and 99 percent of the populations, respectively, the more extreme and assimilative policies of the Cultural Revolution would have exacted a greater direct toll on non-Han persons. By contrast, in Urumqi, where Hans made up 76 percent of the population, the wider context of that destruction might be more evident.²¹⁷ This still leaves a question about why Aydar

²¹⁷ For demographic breakdowns of Han and non-Han populations by city during this era, see Shinjang uyghur aptonom rayonluq statistika idarisi, *Jasaret bilen ilgirigen 40 yil* (Forty Years Moving Bravely Forward) (Urumqi: Shinjang xelq neshriyati, 1989), pp. 40-43.

Bazil'baev, who was describing events that were happening in Urumqi, would make the assertion that the victims affected were disproportionately non-Hans. On that point, I will briefly consider three possible answers. First, his most poignant memories of the event were those that directly involved the people with whom he was most familiar. He related to the university's Uyghur faculty and staff more than he related to their Han colleagues. Second, writing from Soviet Kazakhstan in 1978, one has to consider how politically advantageous it was at that time and in that place to frame the events in such a narrow and inflammatory manner. It both reflected poorly on the Chinese regime and reinforced the anti-Chinese sentiments of Uyghurs living in the Soviet Union. Finally, he could be telling the truth. Yet, while once again there were political reasons for Bazil'baev to frame the August 4 Incident as he did, there is little apparent reason for Wang Lide in his personal blog to cover up whatever ethnic overtones may have been present on that day.

With the “Decision of the Chinese Communist Party Central Committee Regarding the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution” (also referred to as the “16 Points”), which was promulgated during a plenary session that ran from August 1 to 12, Mao formalized the goals and manner of the Cultural Revolution. Printed in its entirety in the August 9 issue of the *Xinjiang Daily*, the document charged the masses with challenging and replacing old ideas, old culture, old customs, and old habits – later referred to as the “Four Olds.” Less than a week after the August 4 Incident set a precedent for brutally torturing school faculty and staff, Red Guards were now given a related task to destroy cultural artifacts. Bazil'baev recalls scouring the school library, the archives, and private collections of professors for printed materials – including many rare and irreplaceable items – that were purported to be influenced by the “three black lines.” The books were then burned in front of the Xinjiang

University library.²¹⁸ Abdurreshid Haji Kërimi remembers a similar scene in Kashgar, where Red Guards went door-to-door collecting manuscripts before breaking in to the city's iconic Id Kah Mosque to pilfer religious texts from that location. They then proceeded to Id Kah Square to publically burn their acquisitions.²¹⁹

Beyond literary treasures, moreover, the Red Guards also turned their attention to cultural artifacts. On August 18, a group of Uyghur Red Guards from the Kashgar Normal College scaled the walls of the Id Kah Mosque, where they destroyed a tomb and attempted to damage its dome. A city official stepped in to save the structure, reminding the Red Guards that it was a protected national monument. Other such locations, however, were not so lucky, and during this period, countless numbers of mosques and important cultural sites throughout the region were raided and destroyed or reappropriated for other purposes. The Döng Mosque in Kashgar was used as a carpet weaving shop.²²⁰ Some other mosques were converted into pens for livestock, including for pigs, a fact that religious Uyghurs today report with indignation.²²¹ No longer bound to their school walls, Red Guards further brought the Cultural Revolution to the streets, where they inflicted to the wider public the same kinds of torture that they had used against their teachers. To wear traditional clothing would be to risk being singled out as being under the influence of one of the “three black lines.” If a Red Guard caught a female wearing traditional long braids, they would forcibly cut it. *Doppas* and other such skullcaps were collected and burned.²²² Once again, it is important to remember that, in most cities outside of the capital and especially in the far

²¹⁸ See Bazil'baev (1978), p. 15.

²¹⁹ See Abdurreshid Haji Kërimi (2006), p. 19.

²²⁰ See Abdurreshid Haji Kërimi (2006), pp. 20-22.

²²¹ See Abdurreshid Haji Kërimi (2006), p. 21. See also Millward (2007), p. 275 and Xodžamberdi (2008), p. 604.

²²² See Xodžamberdi (2008), p. 604. See also Abdurreshid Haji Kërimi (2006), pp. 24-25.

south and west, there were very few Hans. It is reasonable to assume that the majority of these behaviors in these places were being carried out by non-Han individuals.

For all the destructive tendencies of these native Red Guards during the early period, the arrival of four hundred seasoned Beijing Red Guards to Urumqi on August 26 only escalated an already tense atmosphere. The regional party committee, for its part, attempted to provide a warm welcome to the newcomers, offering them comfortable accommodations and scheduling a mass rally in their honor at Urumqi's People's Square on September 2. Governor Wang Enmao pursued this conciliatory course in some part out of respect for the blessings that Chairman Mao had bestowed upon them to serve as the vanguards of his revolution. As long as they kept Mao's support, they were largely untouchable. Another part, at least as perceived by the Beijing Red Guards themselves, was that he was attempting to win their loyalties in order to exercise some control over their activities. On August 5, Mao had famously written his own big character poster – printed in full in that day's *People's Daily* – encouraging young revolutionaries to “bombard the headquarters,” which was a call for young activists to attack entrenched bureaucracies at all levels. In view of this, it seemed clear to the Beijing Red Guards that Xinjiang's local party committee had coddled and kept Red Guard organizations on a tight leash, hampering them from accomplishing their mission. Within a week of the arrival of the Beijing Red Guards, new and more pointed big character posters appeared throughout the city.²²³ One read, “The proletarian revolution is without blame. To rebel is justified – first, expose the regional party committee.”²²⁴ Another was even more blunt, saying, “Bombard Wang.”²²⁵

²²³ See McMillen (1979), pp. 188-189.

²²⁴ See Dang Yulin 党育林 and Zhang Yuxi 张玉玺 (2003), p. 243.

²²⁵ See McMillen (1979), p. 189.

More than fifty thousand were in attendance for the September 2 mass rally. In his speech before the crowd, Wang acknowledged the increasingly contentious atmosphere and proliferation of antagonistic big character posters in the capital, stating that “We welcome the big character posters that have been posted around People’s Square calling for the bombardment of the regional party headquarters... On behalf of the regional party committee, I welcome everyone’s criticisms and I welcome everyone’s big character posters. I especially welcome criticisms of myself personally, and I welcome big character posters directed at myself personally.” At the same time, he urged restraint. “Although this is a great democratic movement,” Wang warned, “you should allow the expression of differing viewpoints. You should present the facts and reason things out. Convince the people through reason. Struggle using your words, not weapons, and not by beating people. Armed struggle and beating people stifles and damages the will of the people, and is not conducive to the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution.” Red Guards were to keep a clear distinction between contradictions among the people and contradictions with the enemy. The local party committee, by Wang’s estimation, was not inherently the enemy.

We... should unite to struggle against black gangs and all the monsters and demons who oppose the Party, socialism, and Mao Zedong Thought. We especially must collect our strength to struggle against a very small number of reactionary bourgeois rightists and counterrevolutionary revisionists, and to thoroughly expose and repudiate their crimes against the Party, against socialism, and against Mao Zedong Thought. They must be isolated to the greatest possible extent. The emphasis is to clear those in power within the Party who are walking the capitalist road.”²²⁶

²²⁶ See “Wang enmao tongzhi de jianghua” 王恩茂同志的讲话 (Wang Enmao’s Speech), *Xinjiang ribao* 新疆日报 (3 September 1966): 1.

This was how the *Xinjiang Daily* reported on the speech on September 3, but according to the anti-Wang Red Guards who were on the scene that day, what was printed in the newspaper did not at all resemble what was actually said. For one, Wang Enmao never actually had said anything about “clearing those in power within the Party who are walking the capitalist road.”²²⁷ If true, then this omission would have been significant. Wang Lide, present that day at People’s Square, remembers immediately finding the speech to be odd.

Every day, the Center and the *People’s Daily* were appealing to Red Guards to revolt, to arrest capitalist roaders, and to struggle against the bourgeois reactionary line. To put it bluntly, the target of criticism was aimed upwards towards the highest levels within the Party. And in the so-called “half-witted opinion” of this speech, Secretary Wang avoided and did not even mention that the emphasis of the movement was capitalist-roaders, yet he frequently mentioned struggle against bourgeois rightists and struggle against monsters and demons.

In parlance of the day, “capitalist roaders” referred to the errant entrenched bureaucracy. “Bourgeois rightist” referred to intellectuals, while “monsters and demons” referred to those public figures who had been singled out for criticism as well as the “five black elements”: landlords, wealthy peasants, counterrevolutionaries, rightists, and so-called “bad elements.” “Even if he did mention ‘capitalist roaders’ here or there,” Wang Lide continues, “he ordered it after ‘bourgeois rightists’ and ‘monsters and demons’... Wang Enmao obviously spoke in this manner for self-preservation. He feared the student rebels rebelling against him personally, so he wanted to deflect the orientation of the movement from ‘bombard the Party Committee headquarters’ to the ‘bourgeois rightists’ and the ‘monsters and demons.’”

²²⁷ See Xinjiang daxue xinghuo Liaoyuan bingtuan “dashi ji” bianxie zu 新疆大学星火燎原兵团 “大事记”编写组, *Xinjiang wuchan jieji wenhua da geming liang tiao lu douzheng dashi ji* 新疆无产阶级文化大革命两条路斗争大事记 (An Account of Major Events in the Two-Line Struggle of Xinjiang’s Cultural Revolution) (Sep. 1968), printed online through the *Laogai Research Foundation*, <https://www.laogai.org/document/chronicle-major-events-concerning-two-line-struggle-xinjiang-area-during-cultural> (Accessed 1 March 2016). See also Dang Yulin 党育林 and Zhang Yuxi 张玉玺 (2003), pp. 243-244.

Wang Lide was not the only young person present who noticed that something was amiss in the speech. That evening he and his peers excitedly talked about the governor's errors. Certainly, when the speech was published in the next day's *Xinjiang Daily*, the Red Guards would then have concrete evidence to bring charges against Wang Enmao.²²⁸

Thus, when the newspaper printed a heavily edited version of the speech, anti-Wang Red Guards noticed. For the Red Guards, this dishonesty went beyond simply deceiving a local readership regarding the true message that was given. The *Xinjiang Daily*'s most important readership was that of the Party Center in Beijing, and it was likely that the alterations served to ensure that, at least to that audience, it appeared Wang was following the appropriate script.²²⁹ The Red Guards went to the Party Headquarters to request either a copy of the unedited original manuscript, or at least an audio recording of the speech. This appeal was made time and again over the course of the day, but each time it was rebuffed. In frustration, they started a sit-in on the grounds in front of the Party Committee building, beginning a series of events that would come to be known as the "September 3 Incident." By early the next morning, the Red Guards, recognizing that their act of political theater was not having the intended effect, announced that they were starting a hunger strike. Meanwhile, their numbers swelled. A group of students forced its way into the Regional Party committee building, while another forced its way into the Regional Archives. These moves stirred the Party committee to act, mobilizing plainclothes officers to infiltrate the ranks of the strikers and ordering vehicles that had been outfitted with loud speakers to surround the scene. The intent was to divide and dissipate the crowd. Through the loud

²²⁸ See Wang Lide 王力德, "Qindu xinjiang 'jiu san shijian'" 亲睹新疆 "九、三事件" (A Personal Account of Xinjiang's "September 3 Incident"), *Xian yun ruo hai* 闲云若海 (2 May 2014) http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_53c57b9d01011252.html (Accessed 4 March 2016).

²²⁹ See Wang Lide 王力德 (May 2014).

speakers, an essay titled “What Will They Do in the End?” was read in a loop throughout the day. The essay drew the students’ intentions into doubt and indirectly invited public retaliation against them.²³⁰ Wang Lide, excluded by virtue of his class background from joining his classmates in their demonstration, describes hearing the “earsplittingly shrill” broadcast of the essay, which related to the public that “a group of thugs charged into the Regional Party Committee, assaulted people, cursed at people, and then staged a silent sit-in and hunger strike. We hope that the wide revolutionary masses will keep a close eye on the development of this situation.”²³¹ The essay was attributed to “a revolutionary cadre in the Regional Party Committee.” Under the urging of his party committee colleagues, Wang Enmao acquiesced to the demand to meet the students on September 5, but the meeting did little to resolve the differences between a governor who wished to maintain his power and the Red Guards who were intent on seeing his ouster.²³²

On September 4, at the height of tensions between Red Guards and the Regional Party Committee, the Center in Beijing sent Xinjiang’s existing government a telegram that would provide some reprieve: “For more than a decade, Comrade Wang Enmao has consistently and correctly implemented every party policy.” Released to the public after the anti-Wang Red Guards had ended their hunger strike on September 5, the Party Committee now fought back against any perception that their detractors had any merit to their

²³⁰ See Xinjiang daxue xinghuo liaoyuan bingtuan “dashi ji” bianxie zu 新疆大学星火燎原兵团 “大事记”编写组, *Xinjiang wuchan jieji wenhua da geming liang tiao lu douzheng dashi ji* 新疆无产阶级文化大革命两条路斗争大事记 (An Account of Major Events in the Two-Line Struggle of Xinjiang’s Cultural Revolution) (Sep. 1968), printed online through the *Laogai Research Foundation*, <https://www.laogai.org/document/chronicle-major-events-concerning-two-line-struggle-xinjiang-area-during-cultural> (Accessed 1 March 2016). See also Dang Yulin 党育林 and Zhang Yuxi 张玉玺 (2003), pp. 243-244 and Niu Qiyi 牛其益 (2009).

²³¹ See Wang Lide 王力德 (May 2014).

²³² See Niu Qiyi 牛其益 (2009). See also Xinjiang daxue xinghuo liaoyuan bingtuan “dashi ji” bianxie zu 新疆大学星火燎原兵团 “大事记”编写组 (1968) and McMillen (1979), pp. 189-190.

arguments, spreading word of Wang's accolades through leaflets, big character posters, and more loud speaker broadcasts.²³³ Xinjiang's revolutionary youths had already never been particularly unified. The Red Guards responsible for the August 4 Incident were roundly criticized by the Red Guards responsible for the September 3 Incident, and vice versa.²³⁴ The addition of an adulatory telegram to Wang Enmao from the Party Center now provided the ideological foundations to found an explicitly pro-Wang Red Guard faction. Certainly, on the basis of the telegram, the inclination to "bombard the Regional Party Committee" was misguided. Between September 5 and 12, pro-Wang and anti-Wang factions faced off in a series of debates at Xinjiang University and on People's Square. The all-day events drew tens of thousands of curious spectators from throughout the city.²³⁵

This format was the exemplification of a "battles of words rather than a battle of weapons," as had been laid out in the "Sixteen Points," but these exchanges very quickly escalated beyond any notion of civility. Influenced by the relatively more cosmopolitan and sophisticated Beijing Red Guards, the anti-Wang faction enjoyed a superiority in the substance of their arguments, whereas the pro-Wang faction benefited numerically from the organizational support of the local Party apparatus. When the Regional Party Committee withdrew its provisions of lodging and materials for the Beijing Red Guards, they grew

²³³ See Wang Lide 王力德 (May 2014). See also Xinjiang daxue xinghuo liaoyuan bingtuan "dashi ji" bianxie zu 新疆大学星火燎原兵团 "大事记" 编写组 (1968).

²³⁴ In the anti-Wang Red Guard source that I consulted, the authors praise the September 3 Incident as "the breaking point in Xinjiang's Cultural Revolution history" but describes the August 4 Incident thus: "The Party committees and work teams at Xinjiang University and at the Eighth Agricultural School received a decree from Wang Enmao to carry out the bourgeois reactionary line of 'striking against the vast majority while protecting the few.' Several hundred teachers and students, staff, and their families were labeled 'black gangs,' 'counterrevolutionaries,' 'rightists,' and 'monsters and demons.' They were punished indiscriminately, forced to wear tall caps and publically exposed. Some of them are still serving on reform through labor teams." See Xinjiang daxue xinghuo liaoyuan bingtuan "dashi ji" bianxie zu 新疆大学星火燎原兵团 "大事记" 编写组 (1968).

²³⁵ See Niu Qiyi 牛其益 (2009).

increasingly marginalized.²³⁶ A September 11 *People's Daily* editorial, however, reinvigorated Wang's detractors. "There are leading cadres in some locales... who have provoked segments of unenlightened workers and peasants to oppose and stir trouble for revolutionary students. Doing this is completely in violation of Comrade Mao Zedong's directives and is an error of direction and of line." Thus, at just the moment that the Beijing Red Guards needed it most, the Party Center was indirectly rebuking Wang Enmao's behavior, and that of others like him. The article continues, "In the Great Proletarian Revolution, students are rising up to make revolution and to direct their struggle at those in power within the Party who walk the capitalist road, as well as all monsters and demons. Their primary orientation is correct, and this is the movement's mainstream. We workers and peasants should warmly welcome their revolutionary actions."²³⁷ With this editorial, the anti-Wang faction began once again gaining momentum. Growing, but still numerically disadvantaged anti-Wang groups referred to themselves as the "minority faction," while the groups that favored Wang came to be known as the "majority faction."

Wang Enmao was not the only member of the local bureaucracy who was subject to scorn by his critics. While in the fall of 1966 Wang was considered chief among the offenders, his criticisms were joined by those of fellow Party Committee members Lü Jianren 吕剑人, Wu Guang 武光, Qi Guo 祁果, Zhang Zhonghan 张仲瀚, Lu Xuebin 陆学斌, and Muhemmet'imin Iminof, as well as prominent non-member Burhan Shehidi, who had previously been identified in Beijing as "chief root of the three black lines in Xinjiang." There were grumblings that they were "traitors, spies, foreign fraternizers, conspirers, and

²³⁶ See Wang Lide 王力德 (May 2014).

²³⁷ "Gong nong qunzhong he geming xuesheng zai mao zedong sixiang qizhi xia tuanjie qilai" 工农群众和革命学生在毛泽东思想旗帜下团结起来 (Masses of Workers and Peasants and Revolutionary Students Unite under the Banner of Mao Zedong Thought), *Xinjiang ribao* 新疆日报 (11 September 1966): 1.

careerists.”²³⁸ Under pressure following the publication of the September 11 editorial, Wang Enmao sought to pacify his opponents and deflect attention from the Regional Party Committee by commencing public criticisms of Burhan. On September 21, he convened a struggle rally against Burhan at Xinjiang University, where he is reported to have said, “Get a good grasp of the struggle against Burhan and vigorously seize those who are associated with Burhan. This is at the core of the autonomous region today.” Pro-Wang Red Guards followed up this rally with another at People’s Square on October 13, where they repeated the accusation that “Burhan is the chief root of the three black lines in Xinjiang.”²³⁹ While the budding campaign against the former governor did little to silence anti-Wang Red Guards, the Party Committee managed to remain intact through the rest of 1966.

Over the course of the fall, wider conglomerations of Red Guard groups in each faction would lead to the establishment of two Red Guard “headquarters.” The “Red First Headquarters” (*Hong yi silingbu* 红一司令部) was the majority faction, pro-Wang in its orientation, while the “Red Second Headquarters” (*Hong er silingbu* 红二司令部) was anti-Wang, the “minority faction.” Support for one headquarters or another could have far-reaching implications for an individual. According to Abdurreshid Haji Kërimi, the bitter ideological disputes, especially regarding Xinjiang’s embattled governor, permeated all manner of social exchanges, even in distant Kashgar where he was living. Against charges from the Red Second Headquarters that Wang Enmao was following the capitalist road, the Red First Headquarters posted big character posters declaring the opposite, adding that “Wang Enmao is a good comrade.” During this time, people became quite dogged and

²³⁸ See Niu Qiyi 牛其益 (2009).

²³⁹ Xinjiang daxue xinghuo liaoyuan bingtuan “dashi ji” bianxie zu 新疆大学星火燎原兵团 “大事记” 编写组 (1968).

intractable in their views on this matter. Greeting one another on the street, they would say either “Wang Enmao is a good comrade” or “Down with Wang Enmao,” depending on their allegiances. The agreement or disagreement of the other party in such an exchange would determine social compatibility. “These kinds of differences in opinion,” Kërimi writes, “even damaged family ties, driving a wedge between father and child, husband and wife, and among brothers and sisters.”²⁴⁰

The tension that “Cultural Revolution” factionalism brought into interpersonal relationships remained a vestige of the era even long after Mao Zedong’s death. Just as a particularly proud alumnus may argue tirelessly about the superiority of his or her alma mater in one field or another, debates over who was right and who was wrong persisted. In retrospective analysis of the era, Zhu Peimin writes that “There are always people who say that one faction was right, while the other was wrong. In reality, neither was right...” He points to the words of Ji Xianlin 季羨林 from his 1998 book *Memoirs from the Cowshed*, saying “Looking at them now, both factions beat, smashed, plundered, and even killed people and committed arson. They were all birds of a feather, and none was better than the other. To come today and discuss or debate who was right and who was wrong is utterly pointless.”²⁴¹ This argument is applicable beyond just settling an interpersonal dispute among former Red Guards and their supporters. The historian too has a responsibility to avoid assigning a particular set of value judgements on one side or another. The designation of the Beijing Red Guards and their allies as “radicals” and the pro-Wang Red Guards as “moderates,” a trope that appears in various English-language accounts of what transpired, for example,

²⁴⁰ See Abdurreshid Haji Kërimi (2006), p. 32.

²⁴¹ See Zhu Peimin 朱培民 (1999), pp. 309.

conveys a sense that the latter was somehow less bad than the former. In reality, they both did equally bad things.

As I have previously discussed, the autonomous region is beset with a “constellation of sub-autonomies” below the provincial level, where local circumstances may be at odds with the prevailing currents in Urumqi and other metropolises. These autonomous prefectures, counties, townships, and villages collectively cover a land area larger than the state of California. Additionally, the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps controls a number of cities and other local governments that are outside of the regional government’s direct purview. In framing his study on the Cultural Revolution in Inner Mongolia, Kerry Brown notes that the Cultural Revolution’s various power struggles at the top levels “translated very differently in China’s various provincial centers, meaning that one could talk more accurately about cultural revolutions rather than a monolithic Cultural Revolution.”²⁴² There may have existed similar ideological currents in rebel groups from one province to another (e.g., a faction aligned with the interests of the local Party committee versus a faction seeking its ouster), but outside of Xinjiang, the struggles for and against Wang Enmao were of little consequence. Factional alliances such as the Red First and Red Second Headquarters that were formed on the basis of these local concerns, likewise meant little to those living outside of Xinjiang’s borders. By extension, Xinjiang internally too was structured in a manner conducive to the formation of alternative cultural revolutions. Thus when we talk about Xinjiang’s Cultural Revolution, we are often either presented with a limited view – such as an emphasis on the goings-on in Urumqi – or we are given a confusing and complicated web of names and factions that often have very little to do with

²⁴² See Kerry Brown, *The Purge of the Inner Mongolian People’s Party in the Chinese Cultural Revolution, 1967-69: A Function of Language, Power, and Violence* (Folkestone, Kent: Global Oriental, 2006), p. 1.

one another. The degree to which the various campaigns involving Wang Enmao resonated in Xinjiang's sub-autonomies is unclear, while evidence regarding the Production and Construction Corps is relatively more abundant.

The *Bingtuan* administers cities located in every corner of Xinjiang, but its most populous is Shihezi 石河子, located 150 kilometers to the northwest of Urumqi. Founded shortly after Xinjiang's liberation and home to its Eighth Agricultural Division 八农师, in 1966 the city of 150,000 was host to the organization's general headquarters and both the Shihezi Agricultural College and the Shihezi Medical School. Thus, the Red Guard vanguards of the *Bingtuan*'s Cultural Revolution were students from those schools, who formed factions either in support of the older generation of leadership under Zhang Zhonghan or a newer generation of leadership under Ding Sheng 丁盛 and Pei Zhouyu 裴周玉. In December of 1966, *Bingtuan* factionalism spilled into Urumqi. In the same public squares that had been plastered with big character posters for and against Wang Enmao, there were now also posters regarding Zhang, Ding, and Pei. At that time, Urumqi's Kunlun Hotel was a luxury establishment and one of Xinjiang's tallest buildings. Reserved primarily as a meeting place for outside visitors and high-ranking cadres, it was also a prime stage for acts of political theater, particularly during Xinjiang's bitterly cold winter months. On December 19, the hotel was the site of a meeting of *Bingtuan* leadership, an event at which Ding and Pei were present. That same night, a *Bingtuan* Red Guard faction entered the premises, demanding a meeting and struggle session against the pair. Denied this opportunity, the students began a hunger strike. For four days, the students occupied the Kunlun Hotel, and their number swelled as sympathizers from the Red Second Headquarters joined them in solidarity. What came to be known as the "December 19 Incident" ended

when Premier Zhou Enlai personally intervened, sending a message on December 23 urging the students to resume eating and inviting representatives from their ranks to travel to Beijing to discuss their grievances with the Party Center.²⁴³

A Struggle of Weapons

Like many other high-ranking officials in localities throughout China, Wang Enmao survived the latter half of 1966 by virtue of maintaining a rigid outward devotion to Chairman Mao while at the same time outmaneuvering and squelching attempts by Red Guards to topple him from power. In January, however, a rebel alliance of Red Guards and workers in Shanghai forced that city's mayor Cao Diqu 曹荻秋 to relinquish his post, paving the way for the formation of the short-lived "Shanghai People's Commune," and by extension, the formation of a revolutionary council to replace the City Party Committee. Reading news of this, Chairman Mao voiced his approval, prompting the Party Center, State Council, and Military Affairs Commission to send the rebels a congratulatory telegram, which was printed in its entirety on the January 12 issue of the *Xinjiang Daily*. With this praise, rebel groups in Xinjiang too were encouraged to take more direct actions to remove Wang Enmao's entrenched bureaucracy from power. Moreover, if the telegram was not direct enough, a January 22 *People's Daily* editorial told rebels precisely what Mao intended:

Having power is the most important of all things! Therefore, revolutionary masses, gather up your bitter hatred of class enemies, grit your teeth, be resolute and decisive, and make a firm resolution: come together and unite to seize power! Seize power!! Seize power!!! Take back all the party powers,

²⁴³ See Wang Lide 王力德, "Panguan 'yi er yi jiu jueshi' 旁观 "一二、一九绝世" (A Spectator to the "December 12 Hunger Strike"), *Xian yun ruo hai* 闲云若海 (29 March 2014), http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_53c57b9d0101kh4c.html (Accessed 4 April 2016). See also See Dang Yulin 党育林 and Zhang Yuxi 张玉玺 (2003), p. 244, and Xinjiang daxue xinghuo Liaoyuan bingtuan "dashi ji" bianxie zu 新疆大学星火燎原兵团 "大事记" 编写组 (1968).

government powers, and financial powers that have been taken by the counterrevolutionary revisionists and diehards of the bourgeois reactionary line!²⁴⁴

These words encouraged more direct and brazen action on the part of rebel groups. If this too was not clear enough, a January 24 Xinhua article further upped the ante. “The People’s Liberation Army Stands Steadfastly by Rebel Factions and Resolutely Supports the Seizure of Power from Those in Power Who Follow the Capitalist Road” reads the head article in the *Xinjiang Daily*, suggesting that the military would henceforth be involving itself in the struggle, providing backing to rebels performing their revolutionary duties.²⁴⁵ In case there was any doubt the first time, a similar headline was printed on January 25, once again thrusting the military into an already dangerous factional equation.

It is perhaps no surprise that headlines such as these presaged a violent shift in Xinjiang’s Cultural Revolution. The “January 26 Incident” in Shihezi, which left 27 people dead and twenty mortally wounded, is remembered as the first instance of bloodshed and the “first gunshots of Xinjiang’s Cultural Revolution.”²⁴⁶ In response to Mao’s call to “seize power,” both *Bingtuan* factions responded, each believing themselves to be the “rebel faction” to which the Chairman was referring. A skirmish erupted as they attempted to take control of the Eighth Agricultural Division Headquarters, and during the course of their confrontation, one of the sides opened fire on the other. In the aftermath of the battle,

²⁴⁴ See “Wuchan jieji geming pai da lianhe, duo zou zibenzhuyi daolu dangquan pai de quan!” 无产阶级革命派大联合，夺走资本主义道路当权派的权！ (Grand Coalition of Proletarian Revolutionaries, Seize Power from Those in Power Walking the Capitalist Road!), *Xinjiang ribao* 新疆日报 (22 January 1967): 1.

²⁴⁵ See “Jiefang jun zuizui jianding de zhan zai geming zaofan pai yi bian, jianjue zhichi duo zou zibenzhuyi daolu dangquan pai de quan” 解放军最最坚定地站在革命造反派一边，坚决支持夺走资本主义道路当权派的权 (The People’s Liberation Army Stands Steadfastly by Rebel Factions and Resolutely Supports the Seizure of Power from Those in Power Who Follow the Capitalist Road), *Xinjiang ribao* 新疆日报 (24 January 1967): 1.

²⁴⁶ This assertion is only true in regards to fighting between factions. Blood was shed and bullets used against persons accused of counterrevolutionary crimes.

Bingtuan leaders Ding Sheng and Pei Zhouyu reported to the Center in Beijing that it was an “armed conflict” that had been directly planned and instigated by Wu Guang and Zhang Zhonghan. Through the balance of the Cultural Revolution period, this assessment would be accepted unchallenged. However, if you remember, the *Bingtuan* factions were divided between those who supported Zhang Zhonghan and those who supported Ding Sheng and Pei Zhouyu. The fact that the latter two conducted an investigation of the incident and just happened to find fault in their ideological foil is not a mere coincidence. In fact, after the Cultural Revolution ended, a reevaluation of the January 26 Incident found that it was in fact Ding and Pei who were responsible for what transpired.²⁴⁷

In his memoirs, Wu Guang writes of the confusion he felt at being accused of being involved in such an affair. At the time, he was in Shihezi in an official capacity related to his position on the Regional Party Committee.

I came across a lot of people while I was in Shihezi, and moreover was accompanied by my secretary, my driver, representatives of the sugar factory workers, and students from Tsinghua University and the August First Agricultural College. My every word at every moment was in their sight. The main reason for my visit to Shihezi was to speak at a conference, and this speech was open to the public. I had evidence not only in the listening audience, but also in the audio recordings. I figured it would be easy to clarify that I had nothing to do with the bloodshed in Shihezi.²⁴⁸

As for how the incident itself unfolded, he writes, “This remains a mystery for me to this day... When this developed into an armed incident, where did the weaponry come from? How did those people dare in the light of day to open fire on ordinary workers, students, and old folks?”²⁴⁹ Ding Sheng may have had an answer for that, although he remained tight-

²⁴⁷ See Zhu Peimin 朱培民 (1999), p. 312-313. See also Dang Yulin 党育林 and Zhang Yuxi 张玉玺 (2003), pp. 244-245.

²⁴⁸ See Wu Guang 武光, *Bu shi meng – dui “wenge” niandai de huiyi* 不是梦 – 对“文革”年代的回忆 (It Was Not a Dream – Memories of the Cultural Revolution Years) (Beijing: Zhonggong dangshi chubanshe, 2000), p. 36.

²⁴⁹ See Wu Guang 武光 (2000), p. 35.

lipped on the matter until his dying day in 1999. In his own memoirs, he states that in late 1966,

I was staying at [Beijing's] Jingxi Hotel when a rebel faction came looking for me, wanting to meet and talk... We talked for several days about nothing in particular. Well, those same people were formulating a scheme. There were two factions in Shihezi, the rebel faction and the conservative faction. What were they plotting? To steal guns in Shihezi. Shihezi had an independent regiment that had guns. This rebel faction too had guns. So as soon as they stole the guns, then they went to fight. As soon as they went to fight, then they caused an incident. Thus, it was in Xinjiang that the country had its first gunshots, and it was in Xinjiang that it had its first hunger strike. It was famous and quite terrible.²⁵⁰

In other words, the rebel faction that sought him out to “talk about nothing in particular” was also the one that would later acquire the guns to carry out the attack. This provided Ding Sheng an opportunity to frame and discredit his rival, thus eviscerating the arguments of the faction that opposed him. Through this tragic incident, he in fact succeeded in “seizing power,” and that may have been the point.

Once power was seized, what then? The Shanghai Commune set precedent for a governing body with equal representation between the Party and the rebel mass organizations. Editorials published in late January, however, suggested that the military too should have a seat at the table. According to a January 31 editorial reprinted from *Red Flag* magazine, “When Chairman Mao referred to Beijing University’s first-in-the-nation Marxist-Leninist big character poster as a manifesto of the Beijing People’s Commune in the 1960s, he wisely and talentedly predicted our national institutions, a brand new form that was soon to emerge.” This form, the article continues, would be led by representatives from

²⁵⁰ See Ding Sheng 丁盛, *Luonan yingxiong – Ding Sheng jiangjun huiyilu* 落难英雄 – 丁盛将军回忆录 (Hero of Misfortune: Memoirs of General Ding Sheng) (Hong Kong: Xingke’er chuban youxian gongsi, 2009) pp. 184-185.

revolutionary mass organizations, representatives from the military, and revolutionary cadres from within the Party.²⁵¹ Within 24 hours, a “revolutionary committee” was established along these lines in Heilongjiang. A February 2 *People’s Daily* editorial celebrated, stating that “the experience seizing power for Heilongjiang’s proletarian revolutionary faction once again demonstrates that a three-pronged interim authority, formed from representatives of revolutionary mass organizations, representatives from the local PLA, and revolutionary cadres from Party and government organizations, play a key role in the victory of the struggle to seize power.”²⁵² Over the ensuing weeks, Heilongjiang’s “three-pronged” revolutionary committee continued earning accolades from the state media, encouraging other provinces to follow suit, to the point that the word “three-pronged” (*san jiehe* 三结合) itself became a propaganda buzzword, and the formation of a revolutionary committee structure became a benchmark for the success of a locality’s Cultural Revolution.

Xinjiang was different. “There are some problems that are managed too slowly,” Mao told a group of his inner circle in a meeting on February 7. “The Xinjiang problem should be resolved more quickly.” The situations in Xinjiang and in its *Bingtuan* were not conducive for power seizures as in other places, it was decided. Thus, the Xinjiang Military District would lead a guided transition towards the three-pronged model.²⁵³ The Party Center issued a set of regulations on February 11, clarifying that the military was taking control of the Cultural Revolution within the *Bingtuan*.

The Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps must lift high the great red banner of Mao Zedong Thought, must resolutely carry out the proletarian

²⁵¹ See “Lun wuchanjieji geming pai de duoquan douzheng” 论无产阶级革命派的夺权斗争 (On the Struggle of the Proletarian Revolutionary Factions To Seize Power), *Xinjiang Daily* 新疆日报 (31 January 1967): 1.

²⁵² See “Dongbei de xin shuguang” 东北的新曙光 (The Northeast’s New Dawn), *Xinjiang ribao* 新疆日报 (2 February 1967): 1.

²⁵³ See Zhu Peimin 朱培民 (1999), p. 310.

revolutionary line represented by Chairman Mao, and must resolutely support the struggle to seize power of Xinjiang's true proletarian revolutionary faction... The *Bingtuan* will execute the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution under the supervision of the military. No local revolutionary mass organizations or individuals can interfere in or take part in the *Bingtuan*'s Cultural Revolution... For the sake of war preparations, all armed troops within the *Bingtuan* must only engage in positive educational efforts and not engage in the "four freedoms" [referring to the Cultural Revolution-era rights to quasi-free expression through speech, debates, and big character posters].²⁵⁴

Less than two weeks later, a meeting was convened in Beijing between the military and regional Party and government organs to clarify that at the regional level too, the military was going to be guiding the revolution.²⁵⁵ Thus at a time when the PLA was being called to support rebel factions in their quests to seize power, in Xinjiang it was taking charge of the process.

In this, Xinjiang was following a trajectory opposite to that experienced in Shanghai. In the Shanghai Commune, the revolutionary masses had seized power and established a two-part leadership body, consisting of representatives from the mass organizations and cadres from the Party and government. Only later was the military added as a third prong for this leadership alliance. Now in Xinjiang the leadership was going to be set up first through the military, and only later would representatives from mass organizations and cadres from the Party and government be added. Xinjiang's Cultural Revolution was quite different from that in other places. The decision that Xinjiang was not ready for a popular seizure of power was almost certainly reached in consideration of a fragile situation in its border regions. The Party Center was not completely oblivious to the potential opportunity

²⁵⁴ See Xinjiang daxue xinghuo liaoyuan bingtuan "dashi ji" bianxie zu 新疆大学星火燎原兵团 "大事记" 编写组 (1968).

²⁵⁵ See Zhu Peimin 朱培民 (1999), p. 310-311.

that the chaos of the Cultural Revolution might present to the separatist cause. As early as October of 1966, Zhou Enlai warned Red Guards to exercise caution when working in Xinjiang. It was possible, he argued, that people could take advantage of a chaotic situation in order to advance their own agendas, or could infiltrate rebel groups while maintaining ulterior motives in favor of separatist or Soviet objectives.²⁵⁶ This caution, as well as the decision to grant an increased role to military within Xinjiang, would later prove well-founded in regards to defeating the credible threat that the Eastern Turkistan People's Revolutionary Party would come to pose to China's rule within Xinjiang. At a time when revolutionary chaos had endangered or eviscerated the functioning of Chinese public security, in Xinjiang, military security was still somewhat able to respond if a threat was posed.

That being said, the military's increased involvement in the revolution posed some significant problems. Most pressingly, it was being directed to support Xinjiang's "rebel faction," but to whom exactly did that refer? This question had already led to bloodshed during the January 26 Incident in Shihezi. Each faction considered itself to be the "rebel faction" and its opponent the "conservative faction." By definition, it would seem that the "rebel faction" would seek to topple local authority, while the "conservative faction" would seek to maintain the status quo. Thus, in its efforts to preserve Wang Enmao's position of authority, the Red First Headquarters might be considered conservative, while the Red Second Headquarters, in seeking to remove Wang from power, could be seen as rebel. One might assume that the PLA would favor the latter organization. Yet nonetheless on February 24, the Xinjiang Military District began a campaign directed against the Red Second Headquarters, with big character posters that read "Cultivate Unconditional Trust in

²⁵⁶ See McMillen (1979), p. 192-193.

Xinjiang for Comrade Wang Enmao,” “Resolutely Smash the Black Second Headquarters,” and “The First Headquarters Is Revolutionary; The Second Headquarters Is Reactionary.”²⁵⁷ In this case, a clear-cut delineation between “rebel” and “conservative” was likely muddled by the fact that Wang Enmao was not only the Regional Party Committee’s First Secretary, but was also commander of the Xinjiang Military District. In supporting a “rebel” faction, the military could not be expected to turn on its own leadership; the consequences of one segment of the military confronting another could only be disastrous.

Nonetheless, by late March, the conditions had been set to make this dangerous possibility into a reality. A rally opened in People’s Square on March 12 with chants of “Smash the Black Second Headquarters!” Representatives from the anti-Wang faction had arrived early in the morning to participate in a gathering that was promoted as a “Meeting to Commit to Seize the Revolution, Promote Production, and Crush the Counterrevolutionary Countercurrent.” Yet armed guards blocked their entry to the grounds, leaving them out of an event that the *Xinjiang Daily* subsequently celebrated as “a great boon for the ambitions of the proletarian revolutionary faction and a great loss for the might of the capitalist reactionary faction.”²⁵⁸ Just as it appeared certain that the People’s Liberation Army was going to stand by the pro-Wang Enmao faction, however, Zhou Enlai once again cast doubt on the verdict when on March 26 he stated, “It was a mistake to exclude the Red Second Headquarters and other rebel factions from participating in the rally on March 12.”²⁵⁹ This pronouncement at once returned momentum to the minority faction. In May, several thousand partisans from the reinvigorated Red Second Headquarters stormed the offices of

²⁵⁷ See Xinjiang daxue xinghuo liaoyuan bingtuan “dashi ji” bianxie zu 新疆大学星火燎原兵团 “大事记” 编写组 (1968).

²⁵⁸ See Xinjiang daxue xinghuo liaoyuan bingtuan “dashi ji” bianxie zu 新疆大学星火燎原兵团 “大事记” 编写组 (1968).

²⁵⁹ See Zhu Peimin 朱培民 (1999), p. 311.

the *Xinjiang Daily*, which had been operated by the Xinjiang Military District since early March. Ten thousand from the Red First Headquarters counterattacked, and soon fighting erupted on the streets of Urumqi. Because both sides began lobbing rocks and other such projectiles at one another, Chinese accounts record this as the “start of armed struggle in Xinjiang.”²⁶⁰

Yet while many were injured during the street skirmishes following the occupation of the *Xinjiang Daily*, the extent of casualties was restrained by the limited availability of actual weaponry. Over the summer, however, that would change, and such confrontations would become more frequent and violent. Fissures in military loyalties, moreover, would introduce the force of arms, as well as fighting between PLA units, into Xinjiang’s interfactional fighting. These developments were not entirely accidental, nor were they unique to Xinjiang. The Center on June 6 issued a general order, warning that those who engaged in violence would be dealt with severely. Still, sincere as the intent behind the order may have been, Mao had both implicitly and explicitly encouraged violence nearly daily since the start of the revolution, and now he was contradicting himself. Mixed messages such as this limited the efficacy of appeals to order. People were simply too caught up in the passions of their own factional struggles and saw little benefit in an abrupt shift towards pacifism.²⁶¹

Demonstrative of the inconsistencies emanating from the Center, by mid-July, Chairman Mao was already openly musing with his inner circle that perhaps it would be appropriate to provide the force of arms to rebel factions. Shortly afterwards in a meeting with Red Guards, Jiang Qing made the explicit suggestion that they should “attack with words and defend with weapons” (*wen gong wu wei* 文功武卫). This stood in stark contrast with the

²⁶⁰ See Zhu Peimin 朱培民 (1999), p. 315-316. See also Dang Yulin 党育林 and Zhang Yuxi 张玉玺 (2003), pp. 245-246.

²⁶¹ See MacFarquhar and Schoenhals (2006), p. 204.

language of the “Sixteen Points” from a year earlier, where rebels were called to “struggle using words, not using weapons” (*yao yong wen dou, bu yong wu dou* 要用文斗，不用武斗). Regardless, the new slogan was instantly picked up in an article for Shanghai’s *Wenhui News*, and soon after spread to media outlets nationwide. The effect was immediate. Interfactional conflicts grew more intense, bloodier, and deadlier. In view of these effects, moreover, by early August, the Party Center decided to follow through with Mao’s initial suggestion to “arm the left.”²⁶²

Just as rebel groups were being encouraged to enter open combat with one another, the Red Second Headquarters was given another boost. In a Xinhua article in late July of 1967, Xinjiang rebels received national attention for their activities. The article read,

On the afternoon of July 24, Xinjiang’s revolutionary young generals of every nationality, revolutionary workers of every nationality, revolutionary cadres, and masses of city dwellers held a grand assembly and parade in Urumqi. Lifting high a large portrait of the great leader... Chairman Mao and their hands gripping a bright red copy of the *Quotations of Chairman Mao*, the masses repeatedly raised their arms and chanted, “Pledge your lives to protect Chairman Mao!,” “Pledge your lives to protect the Party Center!,” and “Pledge your lives to protect the Central Cultural Revolution Small Group!” In their speeches, representatives at the assembly stated that no matter what, they will stick with Chairman Mao, the Party Center, and the Central Cultural Revolution Small Group. They said they will strengthen unity, struggle resolutely, and will certainly attain final victory in the Cultural Revolution.²⁶³

²⁶² See Gao Gao 高皋 and Yan Jiaqi 严家其, “*Wenhua da geming*” *shinian shi* “文化大革命”十年史 (Tianjin: Tianjin renmin chubanshe, 1986), p. 444. See also MacFarquhar and Schoenhals (2006), pp. 214-216.

²⁶³ See “Relie huanhu xie fuzhi wang li tongzhi shengli hui dao mao zhuxi shenbian, jianjue zhichi wuhan diqu wuchan jieji geming pai de geming xingdong” 热烈欢呼谢富治王力同志胜利回到毛主席身边，坚决支持武汉地区无产阶级革命派的革命行动 (Enthusiastic Cheer the Return of Comrades Xie Fuzhi and Wang Li to Chairman Mao’s Side; Resolutely Support the Revolutionary Actions of the Proletarian Revolutionaries in Wuhan), *Xinjiang ribao* 新疆日报 (27 July 1967): 1.

What was significant about this article was not so much its content as it was the fact that the rebel faction in question was in fact the Red Second Headquarters. This marked the first time that Xinjiang's minority faction so publically attracted national attention, and the article was an indication that the Party Center approved of what they were doing. This was followed up with more such adulatory articles in the central press, and on August 17, the anti-Wang group was for the first time mentioned by name.²⁶⁴ On that very day, just as interfactional battles grew more pronounced, Unit 7335 of the PLA's Ninth Air Division publically announced its support for the Red Second Headquarters. This declaration officially thus split the loyalties of the military in Xinjiang, and heralded the progression of interfactional skirmishes into open physical warfare.²⁶⁵ A 1983 review of factionalism during the Cultural Revolution in Xinjiang found that through 125 interfactional battles, some seven hundred were killed and five thousand injured.²⁶⁶ Those numbers, however, may be understated. James Millward reports that there were as many as six hundred violent clashes in 1967 alone, with seven hundred more in 1968.²⁶⁷

²⁶⁴ See Xinjiang daxue xinghuo liaoyuan bingtuan “dashi ji” bianxie zu 新疆大学星火燎原兵团“大事记”编写组 (1968). See also “Juexin chedi cuihui zichan jieji silingbu, shi bao dang he guojia yongbu bianse” 决心彻底摧毁资产阶级司令部，誓保党和国家永不变色 (Resolutely and Thoroughly Destroy the Bourgeois Headquarters; Vow to Protect the Party and Nation and to Never Change Political Colors), *Xinjiang ribao* 新疆日报 (17 August 1967): 1.

²⁶⁵ See Zhu Peimin 朱培民 (1999), p. 311.

²⁶⁶ See Zhu Peimin 朱培民 (1999), p. 315-316. See also Dang Yulin 党育林 and Zhang Yuxi 张玉玺 (2003), pp. 245-246.

²⁶⁷ See Millward (2007), p. 268.

FIVE

The People's Revolutionary Party Finds an Opportunity

The rollout of the Cultural Revolution in Xinjiang reveals a certain strategic and ideological tension that existed within Mao's inner circle in the Party Center. On the one hand, more pragmatic voices insisted that the movement be directed from the top down, guided by the military in order to maintain stability within historically unstable areas. On the other hand, the decisions both to encourage interfactional warfare and also to provide military-grade weaponry to rebel factions were driven by dangerous recklessness and threatened to undermine stability, especially within historically unstable areas. It was during the period that rebels were encouraged to "attack with words and defend with weapons" that the People's Revolutionary Party was able, within the parameters set by the policies of the era, to gather the strength of arms.

The predominantly non-Han rebel factions in Kashgar shared with their Urumqi counterparts a common flare for the dramatic. Before the anti-Wang faction in Urumqi ever occupied the Regional Party Headquarters in the lead-up to the "September 3 Incident," Kashgar Red Guards on September 1 already started protests on the grounds of the Kashgar Prefectural Party Committee. Upon learning news of the various audiences that Chairman Mao was providing visiting Red Guards in Beijing, students in Kashgar were demanding the same opportunity. For one week, they assembled in front of the Party Committee building, and every day, their numbers swelled as more and more youth from outlying counties and the countryside converged onto the scene. The assembly distributed incendiary fliers, shouted abuses at city workers, and seized and staged struggle sessions against Party Committee members. Having endured a week of confrontation and intimidation, on September 7, the beleaguered Kashgar Prefectural Party Committee announced that it would

acquiesce to the rebel demands, and in October, representatives of youth from Kashgar and its surrounding areas were sent to Beijing to participate in revolutionary activities.²⁶⁸ When the young revolutionaries returned in December, they brought with them a commitment to topple the Prefectural Party Committee, particularly Kashgar's Deputy Mayor Nan Qimin 南启民. From December 14 to 21, roughly the same period that the *Bingtuan* Red Guards were occupying the Kunlun Hotel, students occupied the courtyard of the Kashgar Prefectural Party Committee Headquarters, where they staged a silent sit-in that progressed into a 48-hour hunger strike. Finally, on the evening of December 21, the Prefectural Party Committee received a telegram from their superiors in Urumqi, forcing Nan Qimin to relinquish all official Party and government posts.²⁶⁹ One month later on January 25, in response to the call to "seize authority," local allies of the Red Second Headquarters took control of the Prefectural and City Party Committee buildings, the mayor's office, and City People's Committee. After forcibly removing existing cadres from office, the rebels established a provisional government with representatives from their own ranks.²⁷⁰

In February, the Southern Xinjiang Military District summoned local cadres and militants to Kashgar to announce that it would be guiding local transitions towards the formation of three-pronged revolutionary committees. Shortly after, the military district established control of the city and prefectural bureaucratic offices, postal services, and

²⁶⁸ See Li Xung (Li Hong 李宏), *Junggo kommunistik partiyisining qeshqer wilayitidiki qisqiche tarixi* (A Brief History of the Chinese Communist Party in the Kashgar Prefecture) (Urumqi: Shinjang xelq neshriyati, 2008), pp. 295-296.

²⁶⁹ See Li Xung (2008), p. 300. See also Abdurreshid Haji Kërimi (2006), p. 31, Abdukërim Xaliq (2010), p. 278, and Kashgar City Government, "Wenhua da geming' shinian neiluan shiqi (1966 nian 5 yue zhi 1976 nian 10 yue)" "文化大革命" 十年内乱时期 (1966 年 5 月至 1976 年 10 月) (The "Cultural Revolution" Decade of Civil Unrest [May 1966-October 1976]), *Kashi shi zhengfu wang* 喀什市政府网, 31 May 2009, <http://www.xjks.gov.cn/Item/95.aspx> (accessed 9 May 2016).

²⁷⁰ See Li Xung (2008), pp. 301-302. See also Abdurreshid Haji Kërimi (2006), pp. 33-34, Abdukërim Xaliq (2010), pp. 278-279, and Kashgar City Government (2009).

press.²⁷¹ The relative stability that this move may have provided, however, was upended in the summer of 1967 as factions faced off against one another, fighting under the slogan “attack with words and defend with weapons.” Kashgar’s most infamous interfactional battle came to be known as the “August 14 Incident.” At the time, the Southern Xinjiang Military District still controlled local government organs in Kashgar and, like the Xinjiang Military District in Urumqi, supported Wang Enmao and the Red First Headquarters. The pro-Wang factions were based out of the City Party Committee building. They guarded against attack from the roof, where they had gathered sticks, spears, rocks, and other such rudimentary weaponry. If the rival faction were to attempt to enter the building, rooftop guards would respond by throwing projectiles down on them. On August 14, an anti-Wang faction surrounded the building, preparing to infiltrate the pro-Wang stronghold. A battle ensued, and the situation intensified as an increasing number of anti-Wang sympathizers from outside of the city came to join the fight. Some of those who were converging on the building from outside, however, were met on the street by factions loyal to the Red First Headquarters, leading to deadly clashes on the streets. Meanwhile, a gas truck sped towards the City Party Committee Headquarters, spilling the combustible around the perimeter of the building. Before long, a fire erupted, and the stronghold was engulfed in flames. This turn of events was unexpected, and left many stranded inside the inferno. Entries and exits were blocked by flames, leading some on the rooftop to leap down three floors to escape. Secondary sources I consulted that were published within the PRC make no mention of the human cost of this tragedy, but do state that troves of irreplaceable documents and archives were destroyed, and that Kashgar’s economy afterwards suffered a serious hit. Abdurreshid

²⁷¹ See Li Xung (2008), p. 303. See also Abdukërim Xaliq (2010), p. 279 and Kashgar City Government (2009).

Haji Kërimi, however, who was present that day, reports that “I saw that several people’s arms and legs were twisted and broken, and a number of them died on the spot.”²⁷²

Before the August 14 siege, the Red Second Headquarters was already the dominant faction in Kashgar, while its New City was largely controlled by the Red First Headquarters. With the burning of the pro-Wang stronghold at the City Party Committee building, much of the rest of Wang’s supporters fled the Old City (*Shufu xian* 疏附县) to the relative safety in the New. Following this escape, the factions established armed checkpoints that blocked all entry and exit into Kashgar’s Old City, on the Yawagh Bridge to the north, the Töshük Gate Bridge to the east, the Qizil River Bridge to the south, and in front of the refrigerated storeroom to the west. Over the following days and weeks, the factions would meet at these checkpoints on several occasions, leading to a deadly series of interfactional skirmishes. Warfare in Kashgar reached a new low milestone on August 27, when actual firearms were used in fighting between one thousand anti-Wang rebels and the last remaining PLA detachment in Kashgar. In the firefight, 24 were killed, and 47 injured. All of this brought a flood of refugees into Kashgar’s New City as it developed into a gathering point for those fleeing danger. According to Abdurreshid Haji Kërimi, when news of the gun battle reached the gathered masses, the reality of what kind of opportunity was presenting itself became clear. They needed to steal some guns for themselves.²⁷³

The general order of June 6 specifically barred the theft of state property, but as with other provisions of that directive, that was largely ignored. On August 28, a scene played

²⁷² See Abdurreshid Haji Kërimi (2006), pp. 38-41. See also Li Xung (2008), p. 306, Abdukërim Xaliq (2010), p. 279, and Kashgar City Government (2009).

²⁷³ See Abdurreshid Haji Kërimi (2006), pp. 40-43. See also Li Xung (2008), pp. 306-307, Abdukërim Xaliq (2010), p. 280, and Kashgar City Government (2009).

out in Kashgar's New City that was almost comical in detail. Abdurreshid Haji Kërimi writes,

August 28 started the theft of weapons from the New City's armed troops. During this haphazard seizure of weapons, everyone started taking whatever they could get their hands on. Since the county's armed troops were in the bazar, passers-by were taking one or two weapons each. Even peasants who had come to the city to sell vegetables or melons that day were taking weapons and carrying them away in their baskets. Looking at their firearms, I saw that none of them had their bolts. Seasoned troops stored the bolts and the bodies of their guns in two different places. Moreover, they didn't have any bullets for these weapons. I rushed to the side of the gun thieves and watched them for a while. A couple of soldiers read some Mao Zedong quote, reprimanding them for "the crime of stealing weapons," but the people paid no attention and continued searching, wanting to take the best guns... I grabbed something to eat and returned very late, and people were still pilfering weapons.²⁷⁴

The accumulation of weaponry in the Kashgar area did not end here. Propaganda teams traveled from Kashgar's New City to villages throughout the region and encouraged their likeminded compatriots to likewise collect weapons from local arms caches. Outwardly, the armed rebels professed devotion to Chairman Mao, but beneath the surface, a situation was developing that could come to benefit another entirely different cause.

"Our great leader Chairman Mao teaches that political power comes from the barrel of a gun," Abdurreshid Haji Kërimi said before a crowd of his peers in Maralbeshi (*Bachu* 巴楚) County, where he had traveled as a part of a propaganda team from Kashgar's New City. "Because we don't have guns, our homeland has been taken, and to this very day, we still cannot be masters of our own homeland." The young rebel leader immediately regretted this unintentional doublespeak. He was talking about Kashgar, which was still under

²⁷⁴ See Abdurreshid Haji Kërimi (2006), pp. 43-44.

blockade, but his words could be interpreted quite differently and be applied to some interpretations of the situation for Xinjiang's indigenous Turkic nationalities. At least one person in the room nodded in approval, clearly latching on to the second potential meaning. Panicked, he corrected himself, saying, "To take back our homeland – that is, our hometown of Kashgar – we will need a large enough stock of weapons." With this rewording, most on the scene did not even notice what he could have meant. The man who had given him a knowing look, however, pressed further after the gathering concluded.²⁷⁵ Kërimi was evasive in discussing the topic with someone who was unfamiliar – the People's Revolutionary Party was a highly secretive organization, and loose tongues could prove costly. His XIP comrades were all back in Kashgar's New City. This does not mean, however, that this stranger had no association with the Party. Maintaining secrecy meant that ordinary members were given a limited lens through which to view the wider organization. All things were local, and communication from one party bureau to another would be filtered through top leadership. The two men would in fact meet again years later at the Pailou Reform through Labor Camp, both serving prison terms for their respective associations with this counterrevolutionary party.²⁷⁶

The expansiveness of XIP's organization here warrants mention. It existed in every corner of Xinjiang. By the end of 1969, Ma Dazheng reports, the People's Revolutionary Party had formed 78 grassroots organizations and had party committees in twelve prefectures, 126 counties, and 22 regional-level work units.²⁷⁷ In other words, it covered a scope that went well beyond the activities of its Kashgar Bureau. Through Abdurreshid Haji Kërimi's memoir, we are given a window, but this provides only a limited view. There were

²⁷⁵ See Abdurreshid Haji Kërimi (2006), pp. 46-48.

²⁷⁶ See Abdurreshid Haji Kërimi (2006), p. 48.

²⁷⁷ See Ma Dazheng 马大正 (2003), p. 43.

party apparatuses in other locales, from Ghulja to Altai to Urumqi. Primary materials regarding the wider Eastern Turkistan People's Revolutionary Party are currently stored in Chinese archives, accessible only to scholars whom that government has approved to work in matters of this sensitivity. As such, much of what is presently available about what transpired in these other locations is available almost exclusively filtered through the voice of secondary sources published in the PRC. My emphasis here on the Kashgar Bureau should not be interpreted to mean that Kashgar was of greater import than any of XIP's other offices, or that it was at the center of the party's partisan activities.

The men who allegedly *were* at the center of the organization were by this point in 1967 already, if not imprisoned, under intense scrutiny. For the anti-Wang faction, they had long before been singled out as representatives of the "three black lines." For Wang Enmao himself, they were offered as sacrificial lambs in the cause of maintaining his own status. Six of the seven members of the original Eastern Turkistan People's Revolutionary Party's Central Committee were still alive at the start of the Cultural Revolution: Seypidin Ezizi, Muhemmet'imin Iminof, Enwer Xanbaba, Abdulla Zakirof, Es'et Is'haqof, and Seydulla Seypullayof. The men had on the whole done quite well for themselves in the new regime, but the Cultural Revolution was not a movement that was particularly kind to prominent Party veterans. Seypidin Ezizi was an early target of Red Guard defamation. For a brief period in 1966, People's Square was filled with big character posters condemning Ezizi for being a "monster and demon" and the leader of a "counterrevolutionary clique." Before this pressure could go much further, however, Chairman Mao personally interceded on Ezizi's behalf, sending a telegram stating that "Seypidin is a good comrade."²⁷⁸ As a side note, the Center's praise for Seypidin Ezizi at this time echoed nearly verbatim the praise that was

²⁷⁸ See Xodžamberdi (2008), p. 612. See also Enwer Xanbaba (1996), p. 335, and Bazil'baev (1978), p. 100.

being offered to Wang Enmao, including in the September 4 telegram that Wang asserted elevated him above criticism. Pointing to the similarities, the Red Second Headquarters claimed that the governor had altered the wording of a communication that had been intended for Seypidin Ezizi, and for this reason, they dismissed the authority of any claim that Wang Enmao was a “good comrade.”²⁷⁹

One of Ezizi’s top commanders in his “counterrevolutionary clique” was alleged to have been Enwer Xanbaba. No sooner was Seypidin exonerated, however, when the leadership of the alleged clique was shifted to Burhan Shehidi, and Xanbaba instantly became one of the top commanders in Burhan Shehidi’s “counterrevolutionary clique” instead. He was joined with Abdulla Zakirof, Es’et Is’haqof, Patiqan Sugurbayow, and several others (including a few Hans, lest I give the impression that it was only non-Hans being targeted at this time).²⁸⁰ From 1956 to 1957, Seydulla Seypullayof was briefly a secretary in the Regional Party Committee, but quickly ran into political troubles that forced him out of that position and into the Hami mayor’s office, where he worked for a decade. His whereabouts during the Cultural Revolution are unclear, but there is a conspicuous gap in his resume from 1966 until 1979, at which point one source states that his “name was rehabilitated.”²⁸¹ Through the fall and winter of 1966 to 1967, Wang Enmao remained somewhat loyal to his colleagues on the Regional Party Committee. Despite strong criticisms directed at Muhemmet’imin Iminof from the anti-Wang faction, he continued to appear at mass rallies in an official capacity through 1966 and into 1967. At the so-called

²⁷⁹ See Xinjiang daxue xinghuo liaoyuan bingtuan “dashi ji” bianxie zu 新疆大学星火燎原兵团 “大事记” 编写组 (1968).

²⁸⁰ See Enwer Xanbaba (1996), p. 335.

²⁸¹ See Shërip Xushtar (2007), p. 65. See also Oghuz, “Men shahit bolghan ishlar” (What I Witnessed), Review of *Men shahit bolghan ishlar* by Seydulla Seypullayof (2 November 2011), *Kitap yūrti*, <http://www.kitapyurti.com/?p=696> (accessed 30 April 2016).

“Meeting to Commit to Seize the Revolution, Promote Production, and Crush the Counterrevolutionary Countercurrent” of March 12 – the same event that led Premier Zhou Enlai to criticize Wang Enmao for excluding the Red Second Headquarters – a new slogan was coined, indicating that under the guardianship of the military, members of the Regional Party Committee would no longer be protected: “Down with Wu Guang, Lü Jianren, Qi Guo, Zhang Zhonghan, Lu Xuebin, Burhan, and Iminof!”²⁸² Thus, by the autumn of 1967, out of six original members of the XIP Central Committee, Seypidin Ezizi was safe, Enwer Xanbaba, Abdulla Zakirof, and Es’et Is’haqof were incarcerated, Seydulla Seypullayof was also likely incarcerated, and Muhemmet’imin Iminof was under pressure.

All of this leads to very interesting questions regarding the alleged leadership of the latter incarnation of the People’s Revolutionary Party. I previously identified Toxti Qurban, Patiqan Sugurbayow, Muhemmet’imin Iminof, Abdulla Zakirof, and Es’et Is’haqof as likely and potential members of the party’s top leadership. Yet, with the exception of Qurban, all of these men were already under suspicion or imprisoned for various counterrevolutionary crimes within the first year of the Cultural Revolution – and with the exception of Iminof – within the first few months. From their positions, it would have been quite impossible for them to play any significant roles in XIP’s leadership beyond that point. This is especially problematic for Ma Dazheng and Xu Jianying’s 2006 suggestion that XIP began organizing only in late 1967 and was formally founded in February of 1968, and may explain some of the differences between Ma’s two accounts. In his 1996 telling, in which he poses an earlier founding for the party, he implicates Qurban, Iminof, Zakirof, and Sugurbayow in its leadership. In his 2006 reassessment, only Qurban remains, likely because he is the only one who could have possibly played any role.

²⁸² See Zhu Peimin 朱培民 (1999), p. 311. See also Niu Qiyi 牛其益 (2009).

It should be further noted that the leadership of the organization may have included others – including Xanbaba and Seypullayof – who are not listed as part of the group. All of the XIP leaders named in secondary sources died while incarcerated. Patiqa Sugurbayow died of untreated illness on September 5, 1966.²⁸³ Toxti Qurban was publically executed on May 17, 1970; on the same day, Iminof is alleged to have been quietly poisoned while being treated for illness in an Urumqi hospital.²⁸⁴ Es’et Is’haqof and Abdulla Zakirof both died in prison, in 1976 and in 1981, respectively.²⁸⁵ Those XIP members who survived the Cultural Revolution, however, were given the chance for rehabilitation. Ma Dazheng explains,

In the spirit of the Center’s August 1975 Directive in regards to this case, the Regional Party Committee decided to reevaluate this case in order to reduce punishments and increase education and to transform something negative into something good. This was in consideration that the case happened during the ten years of chaos, that its members were all from minority nationalities, and that the circumstances surrounding it were complicated. Moreover, the vast majority of participants had been honest and forthright, had confessed to their crimes, and had agreed to follow the law. The 387 whose crimes were most severe, who had already been punished, and who had been killed in the course of their activities would be treated as “Eastern Turkistan People’s Revolutionary Party” members. The other 1165 whose crimes were not severe would not be treated as “Eastern Turkistan People’s Revolutionary Party” members, but rather were ruled to have “made political mistakes.” 108 others who were still incarcerated but who had not yet received a verdict were given lesser sentences and released early, with the exceptions of those whose crimes were serious, those who had not admitted their guilt, or those who had exhibited poor behavior during their incarceration.²⁸⁶

²⁸³ See Shërip Xushtar (2007), p. 86.

²⁸⁴ See Xodžamberdi (2008), p. 612. See also Shërip Xushtar (2007), p. 82.

²⁸⁵ See Shërip Xushtar (2007), pp. 84-85.

²⁸⁶ See Ma Dazheng 马大正 (2003), p. 45.

Thus, many people who may have been involved with XIP, even in positions of leadership, were post facto not given credit for their participation. As a result, the actual membership of the organization may in fact have looked quite different than the published accounts record.

Commander Atixan Axunop (*Abongnuofu* 阿洪诺夫) was first secretary of XIP's Kashgar Bureau. The decorated 53-year-old Uyghur veteran of the Three Districts Revolution and the 1962 Sino-Indian War was the head of Kashgar's tractor station.²⁸⁷ Axunop kept a low profile, so he did not participate in the theft of firearms in Kashgar's New City. Still, he was perceptive and curious, observing and asking details about potential arms storage vulnerabilities that could be exploited. The Kashgar Bureau did not currently have authorization from XIP's Center to take action, but Axunop was already making logistical plans for the day that he believed was inevitable.²⁸⁸ Few others were contemplating the same kind of long-term visions. Among many of the refugees in the New City, there was an almost singular focus on how to get the upper hand in the revolution that was unfolding, how to gain a factional advantage, and how to liberate Kashgar. Within the New City, the Southern Xinjiang Military District organized a "Kashgar Prefectural Proletarian Revolutionary Committee," referred to as the "Joint Committee" (*lian wei* 联委) for short, consisting of military leaders, prefectural cadres, and representatives of the mass organizations.²⁸⁹ It was a three-pronged precursor for a future revolutionary committee, and constituted a unified force with which to liberate Kashgar. Yet after months of factional skirmishes, unity was difficult to forge and to maintain. Mass organizations within the Joint Committee formed armed battalions to attempt to break through the defenses at the Qizil

²⁸⁷ See Abdurreshid Haji Kërimi (2006), p. 195.

²⁸⁸ See Abdurreshid Haji Kërimi (2006), pp. 42-44.

²⁸⁹ See Abdurreshid Haji Kërimi (2006), pp. 50-55.

River Bridge. The rebels occupying Kashgar as well, however, were heavily armed, and passage across the bridge into the city was going to be impossible without a considerable fight. As a few unfortunate partisans discovered, moreover, an electric charge was fed into the Qizil River, rendering it an impassible death trap. Scores were killed in an ensuing battle, stopped short only when the Southern Xinjiang Military District sent a brigade to intervene.²⁹⁰ The impasse in Kashgar ultimately captured the attention of Premier Zhou Enlai. “Cease the armed struggle,” he said in a phone call to the rebels on October 13, “Free up traffic. Each organization should struggle, criticize, and reform themselves. Dissolve the headquarters and unite.”²⁹¹ After two days of negotiations between the factions, they came to an agreement on October 15 that ended the blockade and that weapons would be cast aside. Afterwards, the city enjoyed a brief period of relative peace.²⁹²

After returning to Kashgar, the Joint Committee established a western, central, and primary headquarters. Before long, however, the committee splintered, and new factions emerged under new names and with their own armed defense forces. A massively slimmed-down pro-Wang “Joint Committee” did continue to exist as a faction, albeit in a weakened state with few weapons or members. The largest of the new factions was the *San Cu Hui* 三促会, or the “Organization for the Promotion of the Three,” which was also pro-Wang. The anti-Wang *Gong Dai Hui* 工代会, or the “Workers Representative Organization,” had particular strength within the Prefectural Transportation Office, while the anti-Wang “Kashgar Branch of the Second Headquarters” (*kashi fenbu* 喀什分部) consisted primarily of

²⁹⁰ See Abdurreshid Haji Kërimi (2006), pp. 44-45. See also Li Xung (2008), p. 306.

²⁹¹ See Kashgar City Government (2009).

²⁹² See Abdurreshid Haji Kërimi (2006), pp. 55-57. See also Li Xung (2008), p. 307, Abdukërim Xaliq (2010), p. 280, and Kashgar City Government (2009).

students at Kashgar Normal College.²⁹³ Before long, fighting erupted between these organizations, once again destabilizing Kashgar through a series of deadly armed battles that continued through 1968 and into 1969. The scenes described of these *mêlées* resemble warzones.

One such event happened on April 22, 1968 in a matchup between the pro-Wang *San Cu Hui* and the anti-Wang *Gong Dai Hui*. The *San Cu Hui* occupied Kashgar's Medical School. There were bombs planted near the front gate, and landmines buried in the wooded grounds surrounding the school. The roof was outfitted with machine guns, and the building was surrounded by a moat that was five meters deep. On the evening of April 22, members of the *Gong Dai Hui* attempted to breach the fortifications, triggering explosions that drew sentried *San Cu Hui* partisans to draw their weapons and fire upon the intruders, killing several.²⁹⁴ On June 1 of that year, the *Gong Dai Hui* staged an assault on a rally of the *San Cu Hui* at Kashgar's People's Square. The two sides traded fire, and four people were killed. That same night, the *San Cu Hui* seized seven people from the offices of the Prefectural Party Committee and beat two of them to death.²⁹⁵ On September 23, a battle erupted between two opposing *Bingtuan* field armies in Kashgar. The pro-Wang Fourth Field Army joined forces with the *San Cu Hui* in an attack on the anti-Wang Eighth Field Army and the *Bingtuan*'s Independent Third Battalion. Through the daylong battle, Kashgar residents remained in their homes, too frightened to venture out into the streets. By the following morning, sixteen were killed and another seventeen seriously wounded. Before

²⁹³ Abdurreshid Haji Kërimi (2006), pp. 57-60 provides the most detailed descriptions of these various organizations, but references to them can also be found in Li Xung (2008), pp. 306-307, Abdukërim Xaliq (2010), pp. 280-281, and Kashgar City Government (2009).

²⁹⁴ See Abdurreshid Haji Kërimi (2006), pp. 63-64.

²⁹⁵ See Abdukërim Xaliq (2010), pp. 280-281.

fighting could pick up again, the Southern Xinjiang Military District intervened, forcing an end to the conflict.²⁹⁶

The establishment of the Regional Revolutionary Committee on September 5 of 1968 was intended as a solution to Xinjiang's factionalism. This was the culminating event after years of internal disorder and strife, and was choreographed in the official press as a great unifying event.

The great red sun shines upon the Tianshan Range, and now Xinjiang joins the nation in celebration... The glorious day that Xinjiang's eight million people of all nationalities have long anticipated has finally arrived! Today a celebratory rally will be held in Urumqi's People's Square, simultaneously commemorating the establishment of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region Revolutionary Committee and the Urumqi City Revolutionary Committee... The victorious emergence of the Xinjiang... Revolutionary Committee is a great victory for the invincible Mao Zedong Thought! It is a great victory for the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution in our homeland's northwestern anti-imperialist, anti-revisionist outpost! It is another victorious song of triumph, resounding through the heavens for Chairman Mao's proletarian revolutionary line! This great victory demonstrates that the pipe dream of restoring capitalism has been thoroughly shattered for China's Khrushchev [as a discredited Liu Shaoqi was referred] and his representatives in Xinjiang. It demonstrates the total bankruptcy of the nefarious plot by modern revisionism in the Soviet Union to disrupt the unity of the nationalities and the unification of our country. This great victory is a critical blow against all reactionary factions, foreign and domestic. It strengthens the struggles against revisionism and imperialism. It solidifies border defenses. It protects the homeland. It solidifies and strengthens the dictatorship of the proletariat, and it has great strategic significance... The victorious emergence of the Xinjiang... Revolutionary Committee, marking that the autonomous region's Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution has achieved a decisive victory and has entered a new stage, has laid solid foundations for achieving a total victory in the autonomous region's... Cultural Revolution. It has set in place a new glorious milestone in Xinjiang's socialist revolutionary journey.²⁹⁷

²⁹⁶ See Abdurreshid Haji Kërimi (2006), pp. 65-66.

²⁹⁷ See "Xinjiang weiwu'er zizhiqu he wulumuqi shi geming weiyuanhui ding jinri chengli" 新疆维吾尔自治区和乌鲁木齐市革命委员会定今日成立 (Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region and Urumqi City Revolutionary Committees Scheduled To Be Established Today), *Xinjiang ribao* (5 September 1968): 1.

This adulation notwithstanding, however, factionalism and factional violence continued unabated. On even the most superficial level, the revolutionary committee failed to resolve at least one matter of difference between the First and Second Headquarters. Wang Enmao remained a vice-chairman of the new governing body. After more than two years of clamoring for his dismissal, anti-Wang factions were denied this victory. Wang maintained that post through the end of 1968, only then being removed as an olive branch intended to bring about an elusive peace. Yet, even then, the differences between the factions were so profound as to perpetuate civil conflict into 1969 and beyond.

As factional struggles continued, so too did opportunities for XIP to expand. Its expansion moreover was not limited by one factional orientation or another. Axunop, for example, was involved in a faction that favored Wang Enmao. His associate Commander Mijit (*Mijiti Siling* 米吉提司令), the head of the Kashgar City Commune, was the leader of an anti-Wang faction. Both men used their respective connections to the advantage of the People's Revolutionary Party.²⁹⁸ In late 1968, a pro-Wang group gained the upper hand in Mekit County, forcing their anti-Wang rivals to flee into Kashgar. In Kashgar, Mekit anti-Wang leaders Muhemmed Imin Qadir and Rozi Hëkim asked for help from Commander Mijit. Mijit responded by sending a lightly armed battalion with them back to Mekit County. This boost allowed the anti-Wang faction to recover momentum, beating back the opposing faction in a series of battles and stealing their weapons. Beyond what they stole from their enemies, moreover, they began raiding PLA arsenals and military convoys, hoarding an increasing number of weapons at their factional headquarters. The military was still under orders to support the "revolutionary faction." As long as weapons thieves carried either a

²⁹⁸ See Abdurreshid Haji Kërimi (2006), pp. 61-63.

portrait of Chairman Mao or Mao's Little Red Book, and as long as they greeted soldiers by saying "Long Live Chairman Mao" (*Mao zhuixi wansui!* 毛主席万岁!), the soldiers were more or less powerless to object. When the soldiers themselves failed to carry their own portraits of Chairman Mao, moreover, rebel groups felt even more justified in confiscating property. As the anti-Wang faction grew stronger, the factions in Mekit County began reforming along the lines of nationality. Non-Han members of the pro-Wang faction defected to the anti-Wang side, leaving the pro-Wang faction with a membership that primarily consisted of the military, members of the *Bingtuan*, and Han cadres. Previously non-aligned retired soldiers from the Three Districts Revolution too joined in the fight in the anti-Wang faction. From this situation emerged the Zerepshan Brigade, named after the Zerepshan or Yarkant River (*Ya'erqiang he* 亚尔羌河), which runs along the county's western border.²⁹⁹

The Zerepshan Brigade had great success in wresting weapons from the hands of the PLA. Sixteen-year-old Abdusemet Obul, one of Muhemmed Imin Qadir's bodyguards, suggested that the brigade raid a military agricultural outpost located in Mekit County to collect weapons that could then be transported to their anti-Wang allies in Kashgar. Before attempting a move against the farm, however, he started a propaganda campaign in the surrounding villages in order to enlist the help of local villagers, and consequently drew more people into the Zerepshan Brigade's membership. Based on Abdurreshid Haji Kërimi's description, it is difficult to tell exactly how the young man had identified the agricultural outpost as a military site. There were no weapons in sight, and the workers on the farm professed to be simple peasants. It was only by employing the use of torture against the

²⁹⁹ See Abdurreshid Haji Kërimi (2006), pp. 81-87.

alleged soldiers that they revealed where they had a sizeable hidden weapons cache – buried nearly a foot under the surface of the soil.

The terrain of the entire farm changed that night... A sea of people converged upon the grounds. Using tractors and plows, the weapons were all unearthed... In an instant, the barren, empty earth was now covered in wood, for the weapons had been buried in wooden crates... There were too many weapons to be gathered in one go, and it took several days to collect them all. There was an inordinate number of them, all of very fine quality. There were also many bullets; all of them were taken.³⁰⁰

Under Abdusemet Obul's leadership, the Zerepshan Brigade also raided a military outpost on the Poskam Bridge, which spans the Zerepshan River from Yarkant and Poskam (Zepu 泽普) County. In the darkness of the early morning, Obul's men executed their assault, brandishing their rebel credentials with shouts of "Long Live Chairman Mao!" in order to prevent the soldiers from fighting back as they stole the military's weapons.³⁰¹ When Axunop heard of the success that the Zerepshan Brigade was enjoying in Mekit, he began vetting both Muhemmed Imin Qadir and his brigade, later deciding to invite Qadir to head a Mekit Branch of the People's Revolutionary Party.

Inasmuch as the Cultural Revolution was guided along by any real plan, it seems clear that Chairman Mao sought for it to consist of two thematic stages: first would come the destruction, and then, construction. The destructive phase in Xinjiang ended with its indigenous peoples, many already antagonistic to Chinese governance, suddenly gifted with large quantities of military-grade weaponry. Over the course of violent street battles, these well-armed individuals gained valuable real-world tactical experience. They learned to set up a defensive perimeter and to build and detonate bombs. As long as they paid the proper lip

³⁰⁰ See Abdurreshid Haji Kërimi, p. 90-91.

³⁰¹ See Abdurreshid Haji Kërimi, pp. 92-96.

service to the Great Helmsman, people could say and do more or less whatever they wanted, without sanction. They were trained to be politically active and aware, to distrust and disdain local bureaucracy, and to not respond to authority. The tensions, the anarchy, the factionalism, the weaponry, and the violence were common themes in China during the Cultural Revolution. Other battles in other places were larger in scale and more deadly than what happened in distant Xinjiang. What was less common in Xinjiang, however, was that it possessed a significant demographic that would not be interested in proceeding to the construction stage of this revolution. They would not be interested in building a new Chinese bureaucracy. They viewed this moment as an unprecedented opportunity to take charge of their own fates. By 1969, circumstances on and beyond Xinjiang's borders would make this opportunity all the more plausible.

The Brink of War

In the late 1960s, the Soviet Union faced unprecedented challenges in Europe, and developments in China only served to exacerbate deepening fractures within the Warsaw Pact. When Alexander Dubček rose to power as First Secretary of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia in January of 1968, his country was just emerging from years of recession. A Soviet-style command economy, thrust on Czechoslovakia without accommodation to local conditions, had proven a woefully inadequate model for such an already-industrialized and relatively prosperous state.³⁰² Dubček's predecessor Antonín Novotný, who had risen to power in 1953 as a hardline Stalinist, was compelled by circumstances to implement political and economic reforms over the course of his nearly fifteen years in office. When the Soviet

³⁰² See Kieran Williams, *The Prague Spring and Its Aftermath: Czechoslovak Politics, 1968-1970* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 20-24.

Union under Khrushchev openly began the process of de-Stalinization in 1956, Czechoslovakia had little choice but to respond in kind, although Novotný was at best a cautious reformer along those lines.³⁰³ The hardships that forced his hand with economic reform, however, lay directly in the perils of the dogmatic implementation of Soviet policy outside of the Soviet Union. With the economic reforms of 1965, Czechoslovakia's lagging economy was almost instantly resuscitated, but at the same time, the state was now bucking the example of its chief ally.³⁰⁴ The rapid pace of economic liberalization led to questions regarding the relatively tepid moves towards political reform under Novotný. Growing tensions and unease swelled over 1967 until, in early 1968, he was forced to step down in favor of the more reform-minded Dubček.³⁰⁵

Dubček governed Czechoslovakia during a brief period referred to as the “Prague Spring,” during which the communist leader introduced a number of liberal reforms, including the rollbacks of previous restrictions on speech, movement, and the media. The speed with which these changes were implemented, and the propensity of the newly unfettered Czechoslovakian press to explore topics such as Soviet economic exploitation and the historical legitimacy of communist rule, raised concerns in Moscow that it was losing its grip in Prague. The thought that these developments might lead to a fracturing of the Warsaw Pact, or worse, to an embarrassing realignment of Czechoslovakia towards Western Europe and even NATO, led Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev to call for bilateral negotiations to ease his worries. Though Dubček reassured Brezhnev during their July summit in Čierna nad Tisou that Czechoslovakia had no intentions to withdraw from its commitments to the Eastern Bloc, he also defended the reforms involved in what he had dubbed “socialism with

³⁰³ See Williams (1997), p. 7.

³⁰⁴ See Williams (1997), p. 24.

³⁰⁵ See Williams (1997), pp. 63-70.

a human face.”³⁰⁶ Czechoslovakian guarantees of loyalty did little to mitigate Soviet unease with Dubček’s assertiveness. At a Warsaw Pact meeting in Bratislava in early August, leaders from the alliance’s constituent states signed the Bratislava Declaration, a document that seemingly provided support for Dubček’s continued independence, but in reality was the basis on which a more direct and harder line could be taken against his intransigence. Socialist states, the document asserted in a clause to which the Czechoslovakian leader paid little notice, “will never allow anyone to drive a wedge between socialist States or to undermine the foundations of the socialist social system.”³⁰⁷ This commitment to the defense of socialism became the cornerstone of what would come to be known as the “Brezhnev Doctrine,” whereby the Warsaw Pact reserved the right to respond militarily if a member state turned its back on the Soviet line. On the evening of August 20, the Warsaw Pact invaded Czechoslovakia.

China was no friend of the Czechoslovakian government, nor did it appreciate Dubček’s liberalization program. “Ever since Khrushchev’s clique of Soviet revisionist traitors came to power,” reads an August 23 *People’s Daily* editorial in response to these developments, “they have shamelessly made a series of dirty deals with the American imperialists. The clique of Czechoslovakian revisionist traitors followed suit, wanted to follow in the footsteps of Soviet revisionism, and threw their lots in with the American imperialists.” The editorial continues by framing the invasion as an example of the “total bankruptcy of modern revisionism.” “But the Soviet revisionists view Eastern Europe as their personal sphere of influence and will not allow the Czechoslovakian revisionists to directly collude with the American imperialists. Along with ever deepening difficulties at

³⁰⁶ See Williams (1997), pp. 71-111.

³⁰⁷ See Jaromír Navrátil, ed., *The Prague Spring '68*, (Budapest: Central European University Press, 1998), pp. 326-329.

home and abroad, the tendency towards internal collapse within the modern revisionist clique has become increasingly apparent. Recently, the rise of Czechoslovakia's Dubček revisionist clique has been an obvious manifestation of this trend of development.” At the same time, the article sarcastically points to logical fallacies in the Soviet claims that the move was to “protect the fruits of socialism,” to preserve “the foundations of peace in Europe,” or to benefit “the interminable unity of the brotherhood of nations” and the “peace of the socialist family of nations.”³⁰⁸ The following day, in a speech at the Romanian embassy commemorating the anniversary of Romania's liberation from fascism following World War II, Premier Zhou Enlai evoked direct parallels in the invasion of Czechoslovakia, stating, “This is the most barefaced and representative display of the fascist power politics that the Soviet revisionist traitors use against their so-called allies.”³⁰⁹ While Chinese invective against the Soviet Union was couched in ideological terminology, the potential dangers posed by the Soviet Union's willingness to so brazenly and forcefully interfere in the domestic affairs of another communist state were almost certainly not lost on China's leaders. After all, a Soviet Union that was willing to invade an insubordinate communist Czechoslovakia was also a Soviet Union that might be willing to invade an insubordinate communist China.

By the same measure but to different ends, the Eastern Turkistan People's Revolutionary Party must too have recognized the implications for their cause that were

³⁰⁸ See “Sulian xiandai xiuzhengzhuyi de zong pochan” 苏联现代修正主义的总破产 (The Total Bankruptcy of the Soviet Union's Modern Revisionism), *Xinjiang ribao* 新疆日报 (23 August 1968): 1.

³⁰⁹ See “Zhongguo zhengfu he renmin qianglie qianze suxiu jituan qinzhan jiekeshiluofake; jianjue zhichi jiekeshiluofake renmin fankang su jun zhanling de yingyong douzheng” 中国政府和人民强烈谴责苏修集团侵占捷克斯洛伐克：坚决支持捷克斯洛伐克人民反抗苏军占领的英勇斗争 (The Chinese Government and People Strongly Denounce the Soviet Revisionist Occupation of Czechoslovakia and Resolutely Support the Heroic Struggle of the Czechoslovak People against the Military Occupation by the Soviet Army), *Xinjiang ribao* 新疆日报 (24 August 1968): 1.

inherent in the Brezhnev Doctrine. When Soviet-based Turki refugees in 1962 entreated Moscow to consider supporting a war of national liberation against China on behalf of Eastern Turkistan, Khrushchev refused to consider the request, opting instead to use the refugees as unwitting propaganda tools, as threats against China's leadership, and as provocateurs to destabilize Xinjiang. In response to Chinese insolence, the former Soviet leader was more interested in antagonizing rather than more forcefully confronting Beijing. There was simply no precedent for the Soviet Union to act as belligerent in a conflict with another communist state. All of this changed, however, with the invasion of Czechoslovakia. For years, the People's Revolutionary Party had maintained a low profile, and now it seemed that their patience was going to pay off. The Soviet Union adopted the Brezhnev Doctrine at just the moment that Xinjiang was in a state of anarchy, military weaponry was plentiful in the hands of ordinary citizens, and an underground and well-organized party organization was already in place.

If the Soviet Union were to use the Brezhnev Doctrine to justify military action against China, Xinjiang would certainly be an important strategic objective. One reason for this was the widely held perception that it was particularly vulnerable. Relative to the size of the territory and the length of its border, the PLA presence in Xinjiang was fairly weak. The region was underdeveloped and far from the Center. Its rail line only went as far as Urumqi; for China to amass a significant response to an invasion in Xinjiang could take days. Moreover, many of its residents were ambivalent or even hostile to the idea of their continued union with China. Framed as a national liberation struggle, Soviets might even be welcomed. Yet beyond simple considerations of its relative susceptibility to an advance, Xinjiang had another significant asset that would be of interest to Soviet war planners: it was

home to China's Lop Nur Nuclear Weapons Test Base, located in the southeastern Tarim Basin.

The intent to develop a Chinese nuclear program, with the guidance of Soviet advisers, had been announced in 1955 during a speech by Zhou Enlai before the State Council. Such a move was viewed as necessary after the United States had issued nuclear threats against China during the Korean War; deployments of American nuclear missiles to Taiwan in 1958 only reinforced the perceived urgency of acquiring atomic weaponry. Lop Nur, the site of a now-dry salt lake that was once the center of ancient kingdoms, was selected in October of 1959 as the site for nuclear testing, largely on account of its remoteness, both from China's population centers and from Taiwanese and American airbases in the Pacific. When Sino-Soviet relations were strong, the Soviets promised to provide the Chinese with technical schematics and prototype bombs; as relations began to deteriorate, those promises were rescinded. Despite the setbacks, however, Chinese physicists, some of whom had been trained in the United States, proceeded with nuclear research at the Lop Nur site. By late 1961, American intelligence, using spy plane imagery, had already identified Lop Nur as a "suspect site" for China's nuclear development, along with facilities in Lanzhou and Baotou. On July 14, 1963, US Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs Averell Harriman traveled to Moscow to discuss with Khrushchev how their two countries could prevent China from becoming a nuclear state, either through direct Soviet action or through Soviet assent to American action. After all, a nuclear China was a threat to them both. Khrushchev denied the request, arguing that Sino-Soviet relations were not as bad as they appeared and that a nuclear China was really not a threat to the Soviets.³¹⁰

³¹⁰ See Jeffrey Richelson, *Spying on the Bomb: American Nuclear Intelligence from Nazi Germany to Iran and North Korea* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 2007), pp. 137-194.

By the time that the Soviet Union adopted the Brezhnev Doctrine, however, there was no longer any fantasy that Sino-Soviet relations were not strained, nor was there any denial that the already nuclear-armed China was a threat to Soviet interests. China had exploded its first atomic bomb on October 14, 1964, and a hydrogen bomb on June 17, 1967. If there was to be a Soviet invasion of China, then Lop Nur, nestled deep in Xinjiang's territory, would necessarily be a primary target. By 1969, it would be the Soviets asking the Americans for their cooperation in a Soviet campaign against Chinese nuclear targets.

Yet just because the Brezhnev Doctrine made the invasion of China a possibility did not make such a war a desirable course of action. Despite its reputation as a global superpower, the Soviet Union at this point in history was actually quite vulnerable, and the outcome of a potential conflict was emphatically not a foregone conclusion. It may have enjoyed an advantage along its border in Xinjiang, but in its Far East, which, like Xinjiang to China was a large border region that was far from the Center, sparsely populated, and poorly developed, the Soviet military presence was fairly anemic. Manchuria's relatively greater development, shorter supply lines, and superior manpower all favored China's military strength. Former PLA General Chen Xilian 陈锡联 recalls Zhou Enlai using this reasoning to reassure his comrades after the situation had escalated into open hostility in 1969: because of relative Soviet weakness in the Far East, they would not attempt a full-scale invasion in the foreseeable future.³¹¹ If hostilities were to lead to war, moreover, argues Jiang Yi, a scholar at the Institute of East European, Russian, and Central Asian Studies in Beijing, Mao had confidence that "the USSR did not have adequate [military] preparations [or] numbers... to carry out a serious war with China." Former Soviet military intelligence officer Victor

³¹¹ See Yang Kuisong, "The Sino-Soviet Border Clash of 1969: From Zhenbao Island to Sino-American *Rapprochement*," *Cold War History*, V. 1, No. 1 (August 2000), p. 31.

Gobarev concurs, stating that “according to all estimates... the Chinese possessed colossal manpower superiority... [Soviet] troop levels reached the capacity needed to repulse the Chinese on a conventional level only in the mid-1970s... In 1969, the Soviets were not ready.” This opinion is seconded by fellow ex-military intelligence officer Vitaly Shlykov, who states that “Soviet military leaders felt very insecure in the 1960s, because of the manpower disparities, which were only rectified by the build-up in the 1970s.”³¹² There were other additional considerations as well. A rapid military buildup would require troops to be repositioned from Eastern Europe to the Chinese border, thereby leaving the western front vulnerable. A potential war from both east and west would be catastrophic. The only potential reprieve for the Soviet Union in such a situation would be the deployment of its nuclear arsenal. Still, what benefit could come from adopting a hawkish posture with China at this juncture, and what possibly could justify war?

China’s borders as they were formalized in the Treaty of Friendship, Alliance, and Mutual Assistance in 1950 were remnants of nineteenth century treaties signed between the Qing and Russian Empires. In 1954, Mao approached Khrushchev regarding the possibility of amending these borders, particularly along the Mongolian Frontier; the Soviet leader ignored the request. Zhou Enlai also breached the topic in 1957, once again unsuccessfully. As the relationship between the two nations deteriorated, the previously tranquil Sino-Soviet border grew increasingly tense. In the past, when wayward herders or fishermen inadvertently crossed the borders, border guards on both sides were fairly lenient. Now, as hostilities escalated, they were obligated to respond more forcefully to transgressions, leading to a series of border incidents; still, prior to the Cultural Revolution, these conflicts rarely

³¹² See Lyle T. Goldstein, “Return to Zhenbao Island: Who Started Shooting and Why It Matters,” *The China Quarterly*, No. 168 (December 2001), pp. 993-994.

involved bloodshed. Meanwhile, Mao grew more vocally assertive in regards to the delineation of China's international borders. They were based on unequal treaties, he argued. Before a group of visiting Japanese socialists in 1963, Mao commented that "about a hundred years ago, the area to the east of [Lake] Baikal became Russian territory, and since then Vladivostok, Khabarovsk, Kamchatka, and other areas have been Soviet territory. We have not yet presented our account for this list." Extrapolating from these remarks, the Soviets pointed to a map that was printed in *The History of Contemporary China (Zhongguo jindai jianshi)* 中国近代简史, written by Liu Peihua 刘培华 in 1954, which provides a comprehensive listing of territories, including Mongolia, that had historical ties to China but had fallen away. This, the Soviets argued, was what Mao wanted for China. A 1964 *Pravda* editorial accused Mao of harboring "Hitler-like" ambitions for territorial expansion, while Khrushchev challenged Chinese claims to even Inner Mongolia, Tibet and Xinjiang.³¹³

Against this backdrop, in 1964, China and the Soviet Union began a series of secret dialogues to iron out some of these differences. In negotiations, the Soviets offered to draw up and sign new treaties to supersede the old, provided that such treaties would reinforce existing border demarcations. In no case, however, would old agreements be scrapped until new agreements were forged. River borders moreover were open to a more equitable discussion between sides, in order to protect Chinese economic interests. The Ussuri (*Wusuli jiang* 乌苏里江) and Amur (*Heilong jiang* 黑龙江) Rivers, located on the Heilongjiang frontier, would be a starting point for these discussion of river borders. The Chinese responded that all treaties agreed upon before 1917 were unequal and hence fundamentally invalid. Nonetheless, they would be willing to use nineteenth century agreements as a

³¹³ See Thomas W. Robinson, "The Sino-Soviet Border Dispute: Background, Development, and the March 1969 Clashes," *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 66, No. 4 (December 1972) pp. 1177-1179.

starting point for new rounds of negotiations, with the expectations that adjustments would be made to benefit certain locations that were disadvantaged by the old maps. At any rate, while the Chinese would be tentatively willing to enforce the current borders, at least during negotiations, their cooperation was ultimately contingent on the Soviet admission that the previous treaties had been unequal. Borders along rivers should be drawn at the center of waterways, and determinations of ownership of islands in the waterways would be made on the basis of those lines. Both sides agreed that new treaties should be drawn, that they should be enacted before existing treaties were scrapped, and that border adjustments should primarily affect islands located along the river borders. Where the sides differed was solely on China's expectation, as an absolute precondition to the finalization of any new agreement, that the Soviet Union acknowledge the unequal nature of the old treaties. It was on this point that the talks failed.³¹⁴

Leonid Brezhnev's rise as Khrushchev's replacement in late 1964 did little to improve the border situation. Beginning in 1965, he began repositioning Soviet troops to the Chinese border, and in 1966, he signed a mutual defense treaty with Mongolia that allowed the deployment of a military presence in that country. By 1969, the Soviet Union had more than doubled its pre-1964 troop numbers on China's doorstep, to between 270 and 290 thousand men. In 1967, moreover, it began repositioning nuclear missiles. The Soviets were explicit that the reason for these moves was to contain the Chinese threat; Beijing listened and used this as a propaganda tool.³¹⁵ Periodic border incidents persisted and intensified, although rarely escalating to the level of violence. Nonetheless, a trickle of

³¹⁴ See Robinson (1972), pp. 1179-1180.

³¹⁵ See Michael S. Gerson, "The Sino-Soviet Border Conflict: Deterrence, Escalation, and the Threat of Nuclear War in 1969," *CNA Analysis and Solutions* (November 2010), https://www.cna.org/CNA_files/PDF/D0022974.A2.pdf (Accessed 21 November 2012), p. 16.

sometimes verified, often unverified news reports appeared in Western media about skirmishes, armed battles, and casualties along the Sino-Soviet border. The bulk of these occurred along the small river islands in the northeast that were referenced during the 1964 border negotiations, but Xinjiang's border too, however, developed as a flashpoint. In a January 1967 report, Isa Yusuf Alptekin makes the highly dubious claim that Zunun Teyipof's refugee army alone was responsible for more than five thousand cross-border guerilla raids into Xinjiang in 1966.³¹⁶ This number is almost certainly exaggerated; by comparison, Chinese media in 1969 accused the Soviets of a *combined total* of just over four thousand border incidents between October 1964 and March 1969. Nonetheless, events in Xinjiang's border regions in 1967 and 1968 cemented its international notoriety as a location of Sino-Soviet conflict.³¹⁷

In 1969, China still remained hopelessly mired internally in factional conflicts. Measures that were intended to mitigate the situation – including the encouragement of civil rather than martial discourse, the appeals to the military to support and guide “revolutionary” factions, and the establishment of revolutionary committees – had each failed to bring stability, and in many cases only exacerbated conflict. This was an inconvenient truth that demonstrated that neither the Party nor the PLA nor Mao himself was enough of a unifying force to overcome the magnitude of social and political differences that the Cultural Revolution had brought to the fore. Yet Mao was working against a self-imposed deadline. The Chinese Communist Party's long overdue Ninth Party Congress, scheduled for April of 1969, was intended to be a declaration of victory, and of transition from the destructive to the constructive phases of the Cultural Revolution. Now on the eve

³¹⁶ See “Turkestan Refugees Report Raids on Chinese Sinkiang,” *New York Times* (31 January 1967): 4.

³¹⁷ See Robinson (1972), p. 1183.

of this event, information about which was initially a closely guarded secret, the situation on the ground after the formation of the revolutionary committees was little improved from how it had been prior. But Mao had another trick up his sleeve that was intended to bring about unity.

It is not particularly groundbreaking to suggest that internal cohesion can be benefited by identifying and exploiting a conflict against a common enemy. When internal strife threatened Rome's stability some two thousand years ago, the state was able to stave off its deleterious effects by uniting the empire against Carthage. In a more recent context, the United States and the Soviet Union overcame their differences to fight the Nazis, and the Kuomintang and the Chinese Communists formed a United Front against the Japanese. The American sociologist William Sumner wrote in 1906 that "the relation of comradeship and peace in the we-group and that of hostility and war towards other-groups are correlative to each other. The exigencies of war with outsiders are what make peace inside."³¹⁸ In his 1908 work *Soziologie*, Georg Simmel more fully fleshes out the idea that conflict serves as a unifying force within smaller groups,³¹⁹ while Lewis Coser, writing in 1956, applies the theory on a macro scale, suggesting that shared conflict against an external threat can resolve problems of disunity within a society or nation by leading disparate peoples to collect their energies in pursuit of a singular purpose.³²⁰ The decision by China's Central Military Commission to plan and carry out an attack on Soviet troops along the Heilongjiang border in March of 1969 appears to have been motivated in part by a desire to forge national unity out of an external conflict in this manner. An attack would stop just short of war, but

³¹⁸ See William Graham Sumner, *Folkways* (Boston: Ginn and Company, 1906), p. 12.

³¹⁹ See Georg Simmel, *Conflict and the Web of Group Affiliations*, translated by Kurt H. Wolff and Reinhard Bendix (New York: The Free Press, 1955).

³²⁰ See Lewis Coser, *The Functions of Social Conflict* (New York: The Free Press, 1956).

increased tensions would create the pretense by which China could order a mobilization that would benefit the case for solidarity in advance of the Ninth Congress.³²¹

In late December of 1968, the Soviet military moved onto the disputed Zhenbao 珍宝岛 (Damaskii) Island, located in the Ussuri River on the Heilongjiang border. The tiny uninhabited island had been the site of several international incidents since the start of the Cultural Revolution, at least sixteen between January of 1967 and March of 1969, according to Chinese sources.³²² Before March of 1969, however, none of these confrontations resulted in the loss of life. What happened on the morning of March 2 is described by most contemporary Chinese Cold War historians as an “ambush,” what Lyle T. Goldstein (2001) calls a “premeditated act of state violence.”³²³ In a carefully planned and organized surprise attack, PLA troops opened fire on a vastly outnumbered and unprepared Soviet garrison, killing dozens and injuring many more. Within weeks the Soviets retaliated in kind, exacting major loss of life from the PLA also on Zhenbao Island. Both sides faulted the other for having provoked the violence. While recently declassified documents and other modern evidence indicate that China was the belligerent, at the time, this fact was not entirely clear. For example, a belief that the Soviets were in fact the aggressors provided some of the justification that the Nixon administration needed to pursue rapprochement with the Chinese.³²⁴

“We should let them come in,” Mao reportedly commented to Zhou Enlai after the Premier appraised him of the situation on the Heilongjiang border. “It will help us in our mobilization.” Indeed, the Chairman seemed less concerned about the prospect of war than

³²¹ See Goldstein (2001), pp. 994-997. See also Yang Kuisong (2000), pp. 30-31.

³²² See Robinson (1972), p. 1182.

³²³ See Goldstein (2001), p. 990.

³²⁴ See Yang Kuisong (2000), pp. 41-48.

about the potential political utility that he could make of the threat of war. Mobilization could benefit social cohesion and restore a national purpose. “In the face of a fierce enemy,” he stated,” it would be better for us if we are prepared and mobilized.” Still, he cautioned, “We should stop there. Do not fight anymore!”³²⁵ With this, the masses were sent to work establishing command centers, digging bomb shelters and tunnels, and engaging in military training, all for a war that Mao appeared convinced was never going to come.

³²⁵ See Yang Kuisong (2000), p. 30.

SIX

Cultural Revolution, Sino-Soviet Tensions, and the Eastern Turkistan Movement

According to Coser, a shared conflict can lead to unity only when there already exist clear definitions of both a group identity and of an external threat. Otherwise, the theory will fail. On this he quotes Robin M. Williams.

Given a social group which is a “going concern,” a sensed outside threat to the *group as a whole* will result in heightened internal cohesion... However [this general principle] holds true only under very specific conditions: (a) the group must be a “going concern,” i.e., there must be a minimal consensus among the constituent individuals that the aggregate is a group, and that its preservation as an entity is worthwhile; (b) there must be recognition of an outside threat which is thought to menace the group as a whole, not just some part of it.³²⁶

On both of these points, Xinjiang posed a problem for Mao’s strategy. First of all, its indigenous Turkis had still not been convinced of the value of Chinese citizenship. Was preservation of the Chinese state really of concern to them? Second, would the Soviet Union be any worse?

In answer to the second question, Xinjiang’s Turkic peoples were being fed an ever increasing diet of Soviet propaganda through radio broadcasts across the border and from mobile radio transmitters. The voices behind the radio broadcasts were reassuringly familiar; these were high-ranking former Turki cadres, relatives, parents, siblings, and friends who had already fled. They spoke of prosperity and liberty in Soviet Central Asia, while at the same time boosted their own legitimacy by reporting somewhat honestly about what was happening on the ground in Xinjiang. After all, the realities that people in the region

³²⁶ See Coser (1956), p. 93. See also Robin M. Williams, *The Reduction of Intergroup Tensions* (New York: Social Sciences Research Council, 1947), p. 58.

witnessed firsthand on a daily basis were rarely reflected in the news that appeared in the *Xinjiang Daily* or other domestically-based news sources. Weighed against one another, local news lacking key details or reality-based stories failed to command the authority of a source from further afield reporting on information that could be seen and verified. Soviet news reports emphasized the destructive nature of the Cultural Revolution and the deficiencies of Chinese governance. Beyond this, it disseminated information regarding Eastern Turkistan-related activity within the Soviet Union, including the existence of cultural and political organizations and of Zunun Tëyipof's Soviet-based "Turkistan Liberation Army," a military force fifty thousand strong that was just waiting for the opportunity to "liberate" the homeland. Finally, Soviet news also spoke of the daily battles on the Heilongjiang border, a topic that was also being covered in great detail in domestic Chinese sources. According to Abdurreshid Haji Kërimi, the Soviet news was very influential in Kashgar at the time. To evade detection, people would go to the countryside and crowd around radios to listen to what they had to say. Those who did not listen first-hand, moreover, would inevitably learn of the news through word of mouth.³²⁷

The People's Revolutionary Party too provided a source of news. It printed at least fifty underground publications, including the newspapers *Torch* (*Mesh'el Gëziti*), *Awaken* (*Oyghan*), and *Independence* (*Musteqil*).³²⁸ There was a great deal of concordance between the points of view reported by XIP and Soviet sources. This led XIP's leadership to believe that both shared an interest in the Eastern Turkistan national liberation struggle. Under this pretense, they dispatched emissaries across the border into Kazakhstan and Mongolia in order to establish contact and gain international support. According to Ma Dazheng, at least

³²⁷ See Abdurreshid Haji Kërimi (2006), p. 71.

³²⁸ See Ma Dazheng 马大正 and Xu Jianying 许建英 (2006), p. 115. See also Xodžamberdi (2008), p. 632.

26 people, twelve of whom were apprehended by Chinese border security, traveled in this manner over the course of twelve missions. Once a relationship was established, the Soviets and Mongolians in kind sent at least fourteen people into Xinjiang, nine of whom were stopped.³²⁹ While abroad, XIP representatives were given access to high-ranking officials in both the Soviet security services and Communist Party organs. They were tasked with providing information regarding XIP's aims and organization, and to probe the willingness of the Soviets to support an independence movement in Xinjiang. To this question, they were given tentative approval, with promises of ideological, propaganda, and material assistance.³³⁰

By 1969, a lot was moving in favor of the People's Revolutionary Party. It had a strong and seasoned leadership. Many of the leaders were hiding in plain sight, simultaneously holding positions within XIP and also the Chinese Communist Party. For example, Abdul'ehet was the County Party Committee Secretary in Kashgar's New City for the CCP, and he was also the County Party Committee Secretary in Kashgar's New City for XIP. Through these connections, XIP's leadership was able to collect intelligence regarding what their Chinese counterparts knew and what they were going to do.³³¹ The policies of the Cultural Revolution not only destabilized China's status within Xinjiang, but also distributed weapons directly into the hands of XIP partisans. The party's success in establishing relations with the Soviet Union served as an important backup for its revolutionary activities, but on its own, it already had a significant cache of arms and other weaponry. In other words, arms assistance, while helpful, would not be strictly necessary, at least not initially.

³²⁹ See Ma Dazheng 马大正 (2003), p. 43. See also Ma Dazheng 马大正 and Xu Jianying 许建英 (2006), p. 116.

³³⁰ See Xodžamberdi (2008), pp. 632-633.

³³¹ See Abdurreshid Haji Kërimi (2006), p. 75.

Xinjiang's Turkic peoples moreover were in large part impervious to propaganda attempts to stir up anti-Soviet outrage and fear through reporting on the Sino-Soviet clashes. On the contrary, many people received news of these tensions with excitement, because, if we accept Coser's theory regarding conflict and unity, they neither felt a sense of comradeship with China nor a sense that the Soviet Union posed a great threat to them personally.

Yet, already in late 1967, the longevity of the organization was being challenged by some of the same Cultural Revolution dynamics that were also facilitating its rise. In late November, the Spark a Prairie Fire Regiment (*Xinghuo liaoyuan bingtuan* 星火燎原兵团) at Xinjiang University, a mass organization affiliated with the Second Headquarters, completed a months-long investigation of Muhemmet'im in Iminof. Upon reporting their findings to the Center, on December 1, Zhou Enlai authorized the Uyghur leader be arrested and kept in military custody. Initial charges against Iminof focused primarily on his alleged fraternization with foreigners.³³² The same mass organization that indicted him, however, faced criticism in late May of 1968 when one of its own members, a Uyghur by the name of Ayten (*Ayitan* 阿衣坦), planned a collective day of action in all of Xinjiang's major cities against Wang Enmao's "Han chauvinism."³³³ The rallies, described by the Spark a Prairie Fire Regiment as being "plotted under the criminal backing of Iminof's ilk," was to be attended by an audience that was entirely non-Han. The mass organization seems almost defensive as it retrospectively emphasizes that the event could be attributed to the "criminal activities of a small number of people," and that when they learned of it, "revolutionary warriors" within the organization had quickly confronted its planners. On the eve of the

³³² See Xinjiang daxue xinghuo liaoyuan bingtuan "dashi ji" bianxie zu 新疆大学星火燎原兵团 "大事记" 编写组 (1968).

³³³ See Xinjiang daxue xinghuo liaoyuan bingtuan "dashi ji" bianxie zu 新疆大学星火燎原兵团 "大事记" 编写组 (1968). See also Zhu Peimin 朱培民 (1999), p. 323.

scheduled date, these opponents contacted the Center with details about what was going to happen, and Zhou Enlai quickly responded by urging its cancellation. The Xinjiang Military District criticized what had been planned, stating,

We believe that this kind of gathering is not compatible with Chairman Mao's great strategic plan. It is a *minzu* separatist meeting, has no value for the unity of nationalities against our enemies, and does not benefit the revolution for the people of all nationalities. It is appropriate that the Red Second Headquarters... opposes this kind of gathering, so we resolutely support them in this important stance... We call on all revolutionary mass organizations and all the revolutionary masses to unanimously rise in opposition to and to halt the convening of this kind of gathering, and to resolutely refuse to participate in kind.

The mass organization quickly cancelled the event and expelled the members who were responsible, but rival factions took advantage of this misstep to attack both the Spark a Prairie Fire Regiment and the Red Second Headquarters.³³⁴ While there very likely preexisted some accusations that Muhemmetimin Iminof was a “*minzu* separatist,” this event was the first time that a direct and targeted association was made as reflected in the Regiment's literature.

Through the next month, moreover, the mass organization, apparently attempting to recover its good name, committed considerable energy to opposing ethnic separatism, evoking Iminof's name as the phenomenon's exemplar. On June 6, the *Spark a Prairie Fire* Newspaper printed an editorial titled “Resolutely Smash the Conspiratorial Activities of *Minzu* Separatists.”

Recently, a small number of foreign fraternizers, unrepentant capitalist roaders who are extremist *minzu* nationalists, traitors, and spies, and their

³³⁴ See Xinjiang daxue xinghuo liaoyuan bingtuan “dashi ji” bianxie zu 新疆大学星火燎原兵团 “大事记” 编写组 (1968).

pawns who have manipulated their ways into revolutionary rebel factions at every level, have come together and linked arm in arm to fan the evil flames and blow the evil winds of *minzu* separatism. They have deceived a large number of unenlightened masses and have brought together society's five black categories and all monsters and demons to form a counterrevolutionary class front. They have used "criticism of Wang Enmao's Han chauvinism" as a pretense to convene clandestine meetings, make criminal reports, and to sell the criminal message of *minzu* separatism. They have wantonly damaged the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, claiming that the Cultural Revolution has brought disaster to the minority nationalities. The appearance of this series of problems is not random... This "nationalities problem" has an organized, planned, guided, and extremely reactionary political objective... This series of *minzu* separatist activities has, from start to finish, been directly planned and personally orchestrated by a small number of foreign fraternizers and extremist *minzu* separatists... Regarding the vicious acts of the class enemies, we must launch a determined and vigorous counterattack, cut off their criminal hands, drag them out from the shadows, overthrow all foreign fraternizers and *minzu* separatists, and smash all the criminal conspiracies of the *minzu* separatists.³³⁵

On June 9, the *Xinjiang Workers' Headquarters* newspaper followed up with an article that justified continued vigilance against *minzu* separatists, even after Iminof's arrest.

Even though Iminof has been dragged out into the open, his pernicious influence has not dissipated nor has his spirit dispersed. Recently another counterrevolutionary countercurrent has appeared throughout Xinjiang, accommodating Wang Enmao's need to restore capitalism and waving the "*minzu*" banner. This is a manifestation of the class enemy's death throes, and we absolutely cannot just idly sit by.³³⁶

Ma Dazheng alleges that Toxti Qurban, director of Xinjiang's regional Uyghur language press, was the original chairman of the People's Revolutionary Party. Ma further asserts that "in June of 1968, 'Eastern Turkistan Party' Chairman Toxti Qurban was detained

³³⁵ See *Xinjiang daxue xinghuo liaoyuan bingtuan "dashi ji" bianxie zu* 新疆大学星火燎原兵团 "大事记" 编写组 (1968).

³³⁶ See *Xinjiang daxue xinghuo liaoyuan bingtuan "dashi ji" bianxie zu* 新疆大学星火燎原兵团 "大事记" 编写组 (1968).

by a Xinjiang University mass organization for engaging in separatist activities.”³³⁷ It is likely that the “Xinjiang University mass organization” in question was in fact the Spark a Prairie Fire Regiment, following through in its newfound zeal for combating *minzu* separatism. Clearly, in Urumqi, a new assault had been started against suspected separatist elements, and this development threatened the very core of People’s Revolutionary Party leadership. Nonetheless, two factors protected XIP’s local branches from the level of scrutiny that the party encountered in the regional capital. First of all, its secrecy and sophisticated organizational structure made it difficult to connect the dots between its various organs. Second, non-Han individuals in Urumqi made up less than one quarter of the population, while cities such as Kashgar and Hoten were almost entirely non-Han. It seems probable that accusations of being a “*minzu* nationalist” would be used more frequently in cities where non-Hans were in the minority, whereas in non-Han majority cities, such a charge might be avoided. Regardless, the early turbulence at XIP’s highest levels does not appear to have significantly affected the functioning of its branch organs.

Yet the involvement of Xinjiang’s Public Security Bureau in the investigations of *minzu* separatists, allegedly starting in January of 1969, added additional layers of scrutiny that were unavoidable even on the fringes. It is unclear exactly how the security services learned of XIP’s existence. Ma Dazheng and Xu Jianying claim that Public Security began to figure things out almost from the start. “[XIP] worked furiously to establish relations abroad and to wantonly spread its separatist poison. These factors quickly captured the attention of Public Security, and an investigation started immediately.” The same source, however, later suggests that the PSB began only an “informal” investigation of the organization in January

³³⁷ See Ma Dazheng 马大正 (2003), p. 44. See also Ma Dazheng 马大正 and Xu Jianying 许建英 (2006), p. 117.

of 1969, almost a full year after they allege it was founded. Beyond this inconsistency, Ma and Xu's account also conveniently ignores the environment into which they claim that XIP came to exist. For much of 1968, Xinjiang was mired in factional violence and lacked a functional bureaucracy. In an atmosphere wherein *everyone* was furiously engaged in unguided political activity, it seems unlikely that security services would have swiftly identified *anything* out of the ordinary. The arrest of Toxti Qurban in June of that year was not a testament to the omniscience of Public Security, but rather was a demonstration of a particular mass organization's commitment to doing its own research. If the PSB truly did begin to act against XIP in January of 1969, its ability to do so was more likely attributable to information gleaned through either an informant or a confession than it was based on its competence as a security service at that particular time. The campaign against XIP did have some early successes. Ma and Xu suggest that Toxti Qurban's successors Ismail Ibrayim (*Simayi Yibulayin* 司马义·依不拉音) and Niyaz Ömer (*Niyazi Wumai'er* 尼牙孜·乌买尔) were dislodged in early 1969. Ibrayim fled to the Soviet Union in February, while in March, Ömer was arrested as a *minzu* nationalist.³³⁸ Still, it would be months before PSB actions against the People's Revolutionary Party would have any wider damaging effects; in the meantime, war with the Soviet Union became increasingly likely, and Soviet promises of assistance gave the partisans a boost in confidence, despite the setbacks.

Through the summer of 1969, the Southern Xinjiang Military District led the work to mobilize Kashgar for war against the Soviet Union. War preparations included calls for people to store food, dig bomb shelters, and to engage in military training to fight in popular militias. A series of underground tunnels were dug around the city, some of which were so

³³⁸ See Ma Dazheng 马大正 and Xu Jianying 许建英 (2006), p. 117.

large that automobiles could enter. The military district organized a series of mass rallies to stir up popular anger against the Soviets. If the PSB had indeed begun an investigation into the People's Revolutionary Party at this time, the military district was either unaware or perhaps naïve regarding the possibility that there might still be separatist sympathizers in power, even after the establishment of revolutionary committees. Dual party members reported to XIP's leadership that high-ranking Communist Party cadres had been summoned for a showing of a top secret film that showed Tëyipof's Turkistan Liberation Army practicing military drills, particularly in preparation for its soldiers to parachute into Xinjiang from the sky after the war started. While the military had shown the video as a dire warning, at least some of its non-Han audience greeted it with great excitement, viewing it as confirmation of information that they were hearing from Soviet-based radio broadcasts. The fact that the Soviet Union might plan an aerial assault or a parachute infiltration was not a secret from the general public. Domestic propaganda warned that Soviet-based airplanes could bomb Kashgar and return to Soviet territory in fifteen minutes. Parachuters could land in the city within twenty. However, the existence of the Turkistan Liberation Army and the fact that potential parachuters would most likely be Uyghurs or other Eastern Turki nationalities was considerably more sensitive and was not intentionally communicated. Nonetheless, through the mouths of non-Han *minzu* cadres who were in the know, the word did get out.³³⁹

At the same time that China was mobilizing its citizens for war, the People's Revolutionary Party too was preparing for conflict. The Party Center encouraged each local branch to gather necessities for a prolonged war, including food, clothing, money, weapons, and ammunition. They were additionally asked to identify staging grounds for their

³³⁹ See Abdurreshid Haji Kërimi (2006), pp. 72-73.

operations. Many of these preparations were already underway; the provisions that they needed were much the same as they had been collecting for months, both in the midst of their interfactional fighting and for the sake of their domestic mobilization efforts. What necessities they lacked, however, were met through the robberies of food stores, shops, banks, and storehouses. XIP committed 22 bank robberies in the Urumqi, Ili, and Qaramay (*Kelamayi* 克拉玛依) Prefectures alone, stealing some 100,000 *yuan* in cash. The Altai Bureau drafted military operation maps and hoarded supplies, clothing, and weapons. The Bortala (*Bo'ertala* 博尔塔拉) Branch robbed weapons from military and police outposts, and established a base camp on a pass in the Qaratürk Mountains. The Ili Committee stole weapons from a local mining camp.³⁴⁰

In the Kashgar Prefecture, Axunop personally oversaw these preparations, while Kashgar Bureau Deputy Secretary Turdi Eli, a professor and dean at Kashgar Normal College, took control of the party's other daily tasks. An armed uprising in Kashgar city would be coordinated with others in surrounding cities and villages, from Yarkant to Tashkorgan to Maralbeshi.³⁴¹ From there, Axunop planned three separate strategic options. The first required the rebels to prolong their subversive activities, keeping the local Chinese under control until the Soviets would be able to enter the scene to provide backup. In the second, rebels from throughout the region would convene at *Suvash Dawan* (*Subashi daban* 苏巴士大阪), a hill located within the Karakoram Range, where Tashkorgan County, Aqtu (*Aketao* 阿克陶) County, and the Tajikistani border meet. There they would meet with refugee soldiers coming from Pakistan and Afghanistan, and when the time was right, they

³⁴⁰ See Ma Dazheng 马大正 and Xu Jianying 许建英 (2006), p. 116.

³⁴¹ See Abdurreshid Haji Kërimi (2006), pp. 74-76.

would greet the Soviets as they entered the territory. This was originally the favored option, but as Sino-Soviet tensions intensified, the PLA significantly increased its presence along the Karakoram Highway, which at the time was still under construction. The third option called for the soldiers to meet at a place in Atush known as Sughunchaza (known alternatively in Chinese as the “Eight Watermills” – *ba pan shuimo* 八盘水磨 – or transliterated as *subongkazi* 苏洪卡孜). From there, they would move into the Pamirs, where they would meet their Soviet allies.³⁴² The original date of the proposed uprising – June 28 – was known only to the leadership of each branch.³⁴³

Tensions between China and the Soviet Union flared through April and May. Most substantiated reporting on Sino-Soviet confrontations focused on incidents along the Amur and Ussuri Rivers, but there were also rumors of conflict on the border between Xinjiang and Kazakhstan. These rumors were given credibility on June 7, when China’s foreign ministry filed a formal complaint against the Soviets, outlining of a series of purported recent Soviet aggressions against the People’s Republic, including in Xinjiang. On April 16, 17, and 25, the complaint alleges, Soviet soldiers crossed into Tarbagatai, disrupting the ordinary patrols of Chinese border guards. On May 2, Soviet tanks and armored vehicles moved seven kilometers into Yumin (裕民县, or *Chaghantoqay*) County, on the western front of the Barlyk Mountains.³⁴⁴ This event, incidentally, aligns with a rumor reported in the *New York Times* in mid-May, although that account accuses the Chinese rather than the Soviets of

³⁴² See Abdurreshid Haji Kërimi (2006), pp. 101-102. See also Ma Dazheng 马大正 and Xu Jianying 许建英 (2006), p. 118.

³⁴³ See Ablikim Baqi Itebir (1999), pp. 149-150. See also Xodžamberdi (2008), p. 633, and Abdurreshid Haji Kërimi (2006), p. 75.

³⁴⁴ See “Woguo zhengfu biaoshi jida fenkai xiang sulian zhengfu tichu qianglie kangyi” 我国政府表示极大愤慨向苏联政府提出强烈抗议 (Our Government Expresses Great Outrage, Issues Strong Protest to the Government of the Soviet Union,” *Xinjiang ribao* 新疆日报 (7 June 1969): 1.

invading the other's territory. Some one thousand Chinese soldiers were said to have occupied fifteen square miles of the Kazakhstani region of Semipalatinsk, in the vicinity of Ayagoz.³⁴⁵ The Chinese complaint continues that on the afternoon of May 20, the Soviets once again entered Tarbagatai, where they beat and kidnapped three Chinese citizens and two border guards, while that evening, a cavalry invaded Altai's Qaba (*Hababe* 哈巴河) County.³⁴⁶

In retrospect, it seems likely that Chinese talking points on most of these events were, if not total fabrications, at least hyperbolic distortions of the true situations. Contemporary evidence indicates this to be true along the Amur and Ussuri Rivers, and there is little reason to believe that China at this point would have described events on its Xinjiang border any differently. Yet at the time, it was difficult, even for Soviet allies, to dismiss the assertion that the Soviet Union bore some or most of the responsibility for what was happening. Less than a year had passed since the invasion of Czechoslovakia, and preemptive action against China seemed wholly consistent with the Brezhnev Doctrine. For China, perpetuating conflict with the Soviet Union served not only to unify a fractured nation, but also to drive a wedge between the Soviets and allies who might already have had doubts about the wisdom of forcing ideological purity on heterodox communist states. By presenting China as a victim of Soviet aggression, Chinese propaganda was exploiting these concerns. China issued its diplomatic complaint – and Xinhua openly printed the full text thereof – on June 7, two days into the 1969 International Meeting of Communist and Workers Parties, which ran from June 5 to 17. The timing was not coincidental. This was the first such event in nearly a decade, a gathering of 75 communist parties from around the

³⁴⁵ See “Chinese Said To Hold Area in Kazakhstan,” *The New York Times* (14 May 1969): 7.

³⁴⁶ See “Woguo zhengfu biaooshi” (7 June 1969).

globe (not in attendance were the communist parties of China, Albania, Yugoslavia, and Japan – all of which were critical of the Soviet primacy in the world communist movement – as well as North Korea and North Vietnam who, for strategic reasons, needed to appear neutral in the Sino-Soviet Split).³⁴⁷

As a precondition for their participation, several parties insisted that the proceedings be published in their unedited entirety, a stipulation that for the duration of the meeting rendered the usually insipid *Pravda* newspaper almost even compelling. This openness thrust into the global view the magnitude of differences between the various parties, particularly in regards to Czechoslovakia and China. One-eighth of Brezhnev's 56-page speech to the congress was devoted to trying to convince fellow attendees of the threat posed by China.³⁴⁸ Despite this, his argument was met with wide skepticism. "Our party believes that the blame and condemnation of the Chinese Communist Party voiced at this conference, like condemnations of any other party in general, are not likely to create a climate favoring the settlement of divergences and conflict," stated Romanian leader Nicolae Ceausescu in a speech on June 9.³⁴⁹ Janos Kadar of Hungary remarked in a press conference that "If there were [war], it would be a disaster not only for the countries concerned, not only for the whole communist movement, but also for the whole of mankind."³⁵⁰ Non-ruling communist parties from Sweden,³⁵¹ Australia,³⁵² Italy, and France, and the ruling party in Cuba too, all withheld support for any resolution condemning the Chinese Communist Party.³⁵³ Ultimately, too many communist parties had been rattled by the earlier Soviet posture against

³⁴⁷ See Henry Kamm, "Dissent Ruffles the Communist Summit," *The New York Times* (22 June 1969): E3.

³⁴⁸ See Henry Kamm, "Brezhnev Accuses China at World Parley of Reds," *The New York Times* (8 June 1969): 1.

³⁴⁹ See Henry Kamm, "Rumanian, in Kremlin, Affirms Policy," *The New York Times* (10 June 1969): 3.

³⁵⁰ See Robert Evans, "Kadar Sees 'Disaster' in a China-Soviet War," *Washington Post* (14 June 1969): 11.

³⁵¹ See "Swedish Reds Defy Soviet," *The New York Times* (13 June 1969): 3.

³⁵² See Kamm, "Brezhnev."

³⁵³ See Kamm, "Dissent."

Czechoslovakia, and this meant that unity in dealing with China would prove elusive.

Despite the emphasis that Brezhnev placed on the problem, the communist gathering was unable to come to an agreement on much of anything, let alone on justification for the robust kind of response to China that Brezhnev may have desired. Of course, the Soviet Union did not need permission to act, but doing so without a consensus had the potential of further splintering an already fractured global communist movement.

The international meeting was still in session when a new round of bloodshed erupted along Xinjiang's border with Kazakhstan. An altercation on the evening of June 10 resulted in the death of a herder from Yumin County and the alleged kidnapping of another. Predictably, the Chinese and Soviets were at odds regarding the details of what actually happened. According to the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Soviet troops crossed into Chinese territory on the western edge of the Barlyk Mountains, where they confronted three herders. When Chinese border guards arrived to intervene on the herders' behalf, the Soviet soldiers opened fire, to which the Chinese were forced to respond in kind. Afterwards, the Soviets sent tanks and armored vehicles to the scene in an attempt to further escalate the confrontation. In their account, the Soviets claimed that the herders had errantly wandered into Semipalatinsk to graze their herds along the Tasty River, roughly four hundred meters into Soviet territory. They were accompanied by Chinese soldiers, who opened fire on Soviet border guards when they approached the wayward herders. In regards to claims that Soviets arrived in tanks and armored vehicles, they stated, "this is nothing but sheer concoction with a provocative aim."³⁵⁴ If the Chinese side was in fact the responsible party, it may seem counterintuitive that they would intentionally escalate tensions in Xinjiang, where China was already vulnerable. Yet once again, framed as Soviet aggressions, these

³⁵⁴ See "Chinese and Soviet Notes," *The New York Times* (12 June 1969): 2.

incidents served to frustrate and anger Soviet allies against the Soviet Union at just the time that the Brezhnev was attempting to draw international condemnation of China. Moreover, if they were staging incidents in Xinjiang, Chinese military leaders were likely taking a calculated risk that could further draw international sympathy and draw attention to a massive buildup of Soviet weaponry and personnel along China's border in Central Asia.

As June 28 approached, XIP partisans in Xinjiang were ready for action. The Soviet Union, however, was wavering. On the one hand, personnel and equipment were mobilizing along the border, prepared to attack as soon as the order was given. On June 24, the Turkestan Military District, which previously covered the majority of Soviet Central Asia, was carved into two, making way for a Central Asian Military District, headquartered in Almaty. The new military district comprised of Central Asian republics that shared a border with China, namely Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. This reorganization served to facilitate a focused response to Chinese border threats and also to provide ready footing against China if and when war was declared.³⁵⁵ To coordinate the military attack with civil unrest, XIP representatives Ayten³⁵⁶ and Abit were at the table in Almaty as plans for war were drafted.³⁵⁷ On the other hand, the Soviets continued active dialogue with the Chinese in pursuit of a more peaceful resolution to their differences. Even if they had previously been prepared to execute a military attack against China, the resistance that they had encountered at the conference of communist parties encouraged them to reconsider how they would proceed. China and the Soviet Union had agreed in May to convene a summit in the Russian city of Khabarovsk to discuss their differences. Fittingly, this city, located at the

³⁵⁵ See "New Soviet Military Command Organized on Chinese Border," *Washington Post* (19 November 1969): A28.

³⁵⁶ It is uncertain whether this was the same Ayten who had proposed the May 1968 day of action against "Wang Enmao's Han chauvinism."

³⁵⁷ See Ablikim Baqi Iltebir (1999), p. 149.

confluence of the Amur and Ussuri Rivers, was previously the Manchu city of *Boli* 伯力, signed away to Russia in the unequal 1858 Treaty of Aigun. The summit opened on June 18, only one day after the conclusion of the Moscow gathering.³⁵⁸ For the sake of Soviet and Chinese interests – and for the interests of most of the rest of the world – diplomacy was the preferred manner for resolving the Sino-Soviet conflict. For the People’s Revolutionary Party, however, a lack of Soviet commitment complicated the viability of their bid for independence.

In June of 1969, China’s Public Security Bureau executed its first targeted large-scale action against XIP. It is uncertain just how and when the authorities became aware of what was being planned, but circumstantial evidence at least suggests that it may have been in late May. In a speech celebrating the establishment of the Ili Prefectural Revolutionary Committee on May 27, Seypidin Ezizi seems to have alluded to its presence.

It is worth noting that, in our midsts, a small number of Soviet revisionist spies, *minzu* separatists, foreign fraternizers, and other class enemies, in order to coordinate with the armed provocations and aggressions of the Soviet revisionists, are also anxious to cause trouble and to use all means of methods to sow discord, to create chaos, to damage *minzu* unity... and are plotting to separate Ili and the whole of Xinjiang from our socialist homeland. Presently, these few class enemies are using the problems of “nationality” and “religion” to wantonly carry out criminal activities intended to damage *minzu* unity and to split our homeland.³⁵⁹

While this language was largely consistent with what had been said about *minzu* separatists since Iminof’s arrest in late 1967, the speech came at the start of a two-month period

³⁵⁸ See Harry Schwartz, “Russia and China: Deep Discords Behind the Border Disputes,” *The New York Times* (18 May 1969): E5.

³⁵⁹ See “Saifuding tongzhi de jianghua” 赛福鼎同志的讲话 (Comrade Seypidin’s Speech), *Xinjiang ribao* 新疆日报 (27 May 1969 Afternoon Edition): 3.

wherein the themes of “unity of the nationalities” and the fight against separatism appeared in the *Xinjiang Daily* on a nearly daily basis.

Public Security’s first major breakthrough against the People’s Revolutionary Party revealed the membership, organization, and activities of its branch organizations in the border regions of Zungharia.³⁶⁰ The discovery of the party’s size and the composition of its leadership – which included several high-ranking non-Han Communist Party officials – led Chinese security forces to organize a joint task force, consisting of members from law enforcement, Public Security, and the PLA, to organize a propaganda campaign and carry out a preemptive strike against the organization. On the evening of June 25, three days before the planned uprising, a state of emergency was declared in fifteen northern cities, justified officially as being necessary to “hunt for dangerous criminals,” to “verify documents,” and to conduct a “population survey.” Transportation links were blocked, and checkpoints were established along the roads. Thousands were arrested in this initial operation – sixty thousand, according to Ablikim Baqi Iltebir, who asserts that only half were actually affiliated with XIP. Because available detention facilities could not accommodate so large a number of alleged offenders, many were detained in public buildings, movie theaters, schools, and storerooms.³⁶¹ Far-reaching as this operation proved, however, it was also limited by the incomplete nature of the intelligence upon which it was based. XIP’s organization in the south remained unscathed. A diminished party center continued operating in Urumqi, headed by Mutallip (*Mutalifu* 木塔力甫), who was the director of the

³⁶⁰ See Ma Dazheng 马大正 and Xu Jianying 许建英 (2006), p. 117.

³⁶¹ See Ablikim Baqi Iltebir (1999), pp. 149-150. See also Xodžamberdi (2008), pp. 633-634.

regional People's Bank, and Idris (*Yidelisi* 伊德力斯), who was in charge of the Xinjiang Infantry School's Translation Room.³⁶²

As China and the Soviet Union engaged in talks in Khabarovsk, there was a minor lull in border tensions. Even as each side continued through their respective propaganda organs to trade barbs and talk of war, the rest of the world was more transfixed on war in the abstract than in actual physical battles. This is not to say, however, that real conflict halted entirely. A border incident on July 8 in Heilongjiang, near the site of the talks, resulted in another round of contradictory accounts and exchanges of formal protests.³⁶³ Countless others may have gone unreported; a Chinese complaint in mid-August asserts that the Soviets were responsible for “more than 429 border provocations between June 1 and July 31.”³⁶⁴ In the meantime, following the June 25 crackdown, XIP postponed its June 28 plans, yet maintained its seats at the table with military planners in Almaty. Even if the current Soviet policy was relying on diplomacy, that could change in an instant. Despite the setbacks it had encountered, and despite the arrests of so much of its seasoned leadership, a Sino-Soviet war could easily allow a reversal of fortunes that could deliver the People's Revolutionary Party an independent Eastern Turkistan. Still, the path to such a victory was narrowing. The Chinese investigation of the party did not relent after the success of the June 25 raids, and the interrogation of prisoners brought new intelligence to light daily. Others who were not apprehended were placed under strengthened surveillance. Chinese authorities attempted, moreover, to more forcefully rein in the factional chaos that had

³⁶² See Ma Dazheng 马大正 and Xu Jianying 许建英 (2006), p. 117.

³⁶³ See “Woguo zhengfu xiang sulian zhengfu tichu qianglie kangyi” 我国政府向苏联政府提出强烈抗议 (Our Government Issues Strong Protest to the Soviet Government), *Xinjiang ribao* 新疆日报 (9 July 1969): 1. See also Charles Mohr, “Soviet and China Clash on Border,” *The New York Times* (9 July 1969): 1.

³⁶⁴ See “Woguo zhengfu xiang sulian zhengfu tichu qianglie kangyi” 我国政府向苏联政府提出强烈抗议 (Our Government Issues Strong Protest to the Soviet Government), *Xinjiang ribao* 新疆日报 (20 August 1969): 1.

allowed the People's Revolutionary Party to flourish. The CCP Central Committee issued a proclamation on July 23 calling for an immediately halt to armed fighting, theft, and other such crimes. More strongly worded than previous such orders, the notice authorized the People's Liberation Army to intervene by force to stop and prevent violence, to arrest perpetrators, and to confiscate weapons. With this command, the authorities and representatives of the military visited the headquarters of Xinjiang's mass organizations in order to collect weapons that were still in circulation.³⁶⁵

The Chinese and the Soviets reached an agreement regarding river navigation on the Amur and Ussuri Rivers on August 7; within a week, blood would once again be shed in the vicinity of Xinjiang's Yumin County border. On the morning of August 13, Chinese and Soviet border guards engaged in a battle. According to the Chinese, the Soviet military, including two helicopters, dozens of tanks and armored vehicles, and hundreds of armed soldiers moved two kilometers into Chinese territory near an area referred to as 'Tërëkti (*Tielieketi* 铁列克提). The Soviets assert that it was Chinese soldiers who moved into Soviet territory, ten kilometers east of Lake Zhalanash.³⁶⁶ According to Soviet sources, two Soviets were killed and many were injured. 25 Chinese were killed and 25 more were injured.³⁶⁷ This was the bloodiest Sino-Soviet confrontation since their March clash at Zhenbao Island, and once again the two communist states lurched towards war.

³⁶⁵ See Abdurreshid Haji Kërimi (2006), p. 97. An image of an original copy of the full text of the proclamation can be viewed at "1969 nian 'qi er san bugao'" 1969 年《七·二三布告》 (The 1969 "July 23 Pronouncement"), *Qingchun wubui de boke* 青春无悔的博客 (13 May 2013), http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_b0a5d6bb01018uaf.html (Accessed 5 May 2016).

³⁶⁶ See Chalmers M. Roberts, "Red Chinese Battle Soviets along Border" *Washington Post* (14 August 1969): A1. See also "Woguo zhengfu xiang sulian zhengfu tichu qianglie kangyi" 我国政府向苏联政府提出强烈抗议 (Our Government Issues Strong Protest to the Soviet Government), *Xinjiang ribao* 新疆日报 (14 August 1969): 1.

³⁶⁷ See "Russian Says 2 Died Repulsing Chinese," *Washington Post* (15 August 1969): A1.

Who was responsible for this new escalation? Asked this question in 1969, an unnamed American China analyst responded, “Who knows? There may be no real fighting at all on the Sino-Soviet border. After all, the only thing we have to go on are statements from two governments that lie regularly as a matter of state policy.”³⁶⁸ Whereas evidence indicts the Chinese for provoking many earlier border encounters, in Tërëkti, there is reason to believe that the Soviets were in fact the provocateurs. Even as the two sides came to the agreement in Khabarovsk, the Soviet Union was showing signs in early August that it was now more committed in its decision to act. “The grapes of wrath are ripening in Xinjiang,” Zunun Tëyipof wrote in an early August article for the Soviet magazine *The New Times*, titled “Maoist Outrages on Uyghur Soil.” The article forebodes a Turki awakening against the “cruel discrimination” of the Chairman Mao’s “bourgeois-chauvinist” policy, indirectly telegraphing that war was imminent and inviting Xinjiang’s non-Hans to take advantage of this opportunity.³⁶⁹ In its August 11 issue, the West German magazine *Der Spiegel* reported that, based on information from Western diplomats in Moscow, the Soviet High Command had formally recommended a preemptive strike against Chinese nuclear facilities within the month, expressing concern that Beijing would have nuclear missile technology by 1970. “In a lightening campaign,” the article states, “the Soviet Army is in a position to occupy Beijing and use rockets to neutralize the Chinese nuclear center in Xinjiang and the Manchurian industrial belt.”³⁷⁰ In consideration of these developments and the fact that the list of casualties was so lopsided in favor to the Soviet Union, it is reasonable to conclude that the Soviet Union planned and executed this incident as a first move in a wider strategy.

³⁶⁸ See Tillman Durdin, “The Complex Question of Who’s Provoking Whom,” *The New York Times* (31 August 1969): E4.

³⁶⁹ See Farnsworth Fowle, “Russians Report Sinkiang Unrest,” *The New York Times* (10 August 1969): 21.

³⁷⁰ See “Blitzkrieg,” *Der Spiegel*, No. 33 (11 August 1969): 18.

Just what was that Soviet strategy? For years, Brezhnev had been wavering between different options on how to deal with China, and had led his country towards different, sometimes contradictory ends. Did he only wish to protect the Soviet Union from outside attack? Was he planning only to decommission Chinese nuclear facilities? Would the Soviet Army move in to Beijing in order to force a change in leadership? Would it move to sever Xinjiang from Beijing? For brief moments, it appeared that the Soviets were leaning strongly in one direction or another, only to have reality – perhaps a fresh border skirmish or a stern rebuke from their allies – send them in pursuit of an alternative path. Underlying this indecisiveness was the inconvenient truth that the Soviet Union was not prepared for a fight, yet felt itself being inexorably drawn towards war. Global observers accustomed to viewing the Soviet Union as one of the world’s two great superpowers watched this uncertainty in puzzlement. Surely, the Soviet side must have had an overarching strategy.

On August 16, Allen S. Whiting, at the time a China analyst at the RAND Corporation, provided United States National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger with a classified brief on this matter. “The unanticipated effects of the Cultural Revolution... simultaneously increased the danger of irrational aggressive Chinese action... and opened up the possibility of civil strife splitting China and permitting Soviet intervention. These changing circumstances permit three alternative explanations for Soviet military deployments: defensive, interventionist, and offensive.” Whiting then adds, “These are not mutually exclusive categories. Different options can be served by similar deployments.” In view of the August 13 attack in Tërëkti, however, it seemed clear to Whiting that the Soviet Union was now moving in the direction of a preemptive strike, escalating an already dangerous confrontation and conceivably inviting nuclear weapons use. In this situation, Whiting suggested, the United States needed to assure Beijing in no uncertain terms that the

United States was not acting in collusion with the Soviets. By extension, to reinforce that fact, the United States should consider offering China the same considerations that it offered the Soviets in regards to formal recognition and limited embargoes.³⁷¹ Whiting's assessment would prove highly influential in US President Richard Nixon's rapprochement with China.

Two days later on August 18, Boris N. Davydov, Second Secretary at the Soviet Embassy in Washington, DC, and William L. Stearman, an analyst in the Office of Analysis for Russia and Eurasia at the US State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research, met for a lunch meeting about the Vietnam War at the Hotel America's Beef and Bird Restaurant in Washington. After briefly engaging on Vietnam, however, the conversation changed to a "rather startling line of questioning" regarding China. First, Davydov asked if the Americans, in improving relations with China, were seeking to forge a Sino-American alliance against the Soviets. With assurances that no such alliance was in the works, the Soviet official continued by asking what the US would do if the Soviet Union were to execute a surgical strike against China's nuclear facilities. Stearman reported after the meeting that "he said, in essence, that two objectives would be served by destroying China's nuclear capability. First, the Chinese nuclear threat would be eliminated for decades. Second, such a blow would so weaken and discredit the 'Mao clique' that dissident senior officers and Party cadres could gain ascendancy in Peking." Such a coup of the personality cult was possible, he argued, because "the Cultural Revolution proved that there was a great deal of internal dissent in China and that there was widespread dissatisfaction of Mao and Lin [Biao]." With that, Davydov pushed further, asking if the United States would respond

³⁷¹ See Allen S. Whiting, "Sino-Soviet Hostilities and Implications for US Policy," Letter to Henry Kissinger, 16 August 1969, from *National Security Archive*, "The Sino-Soviet Border Conflict, 1969: US Reactions and Diplomatic Maneuvers," document 9 (12 June 2001) <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB49/index2.html> (Accessed 7 July 2013).

to a hypothetical Chinese call for help in the aftermath of a surgical strike against its nuclear weapons capabilities. To this, Stearman responded that the United States would likely view such an act with great concern, and would almost certainly want to keep out of such a confrontation.³⁷²

XIP's Last Stand

As much as the conversation between Davydov and Stearman indicated that the Soviets did indeed plan to strike at Chinese nuclear sites, the Soviet statesman also revealed a bit of information that potentially spelt trouble for XIP's hopes for national liberation. According to Stearman, "[Davydov] later added that the basic changes [in China's leadership and domestic policies] could only be made by people in the upper levels of the Army and Party and not by any regional revolt of minority groups or 'tribesmen.'"³⁷³ In other words, based on Davydov's telling, while Soviet High Command had plans for a surgical strike against Lop Nur and other sites, those plans did not account for any concomitant drives towards independence in China's border regions. He was saying this even as XIP continued to coordinate its efforts with the Soviet Union's Central Asian Military District. With this in mind, did Davydov mean what he said? This is difficult to gage. After all, it is unlikely that Soviets would reveal the full details of their plans to their primary geopolitical rival in the United States, particularly when the US was seeking closer ties with China. Publically downplaying the likelihood of a "regional revolt of tribesmen," moreover, might lend the Soviets plausible deniability if and when XIP succeeded in establishing an independent

³⁷² See US State Department Memorandum of Conversation, "US Reaction to Soviet Destruction of CPR Nuclear Capability; Significance of Latest Sino-Soviet Border Clash, Internal Opposition," 18 August 1969, from *National Security Archives*, "The Sino-Soviet Border Conflict, 1969: US Reactions and Diplomatic Maneuvers," document 10 (12 June 2001) <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB49/sino.sov.10.pdf> (Accessed 7 July 2013).

³⁷³ See US State Department.

Eastern Turkistan. There no doubt would still be suspicions and accusations of a Soviet role in its founding, but an early admission of involvement would be counterproductive in establishing the legitimacy of such a regime.

It is also possible, however, that Davydov at this point was aware of a new development in China's case against the People's Revolutionary Party. Roughly twenty-four hours before Davydov's meeting with Stearman in Washington, DC, at midnight Beijing Time on August 18, Chinese security forces moved against XIP's Kashgar Bureau.³⁷⁴ Earlier in August, central party leaders Mutallip and Idris, like much of the rest of the world, had interpreted developments in Sino-Soviet relations, including the battle at Tërëkti, as signs that war was imminent. Party organs in the north had been eviscerated during the June raids, but in the south, XIP remained undetected, and therein remained the party's hopes for success. Mutallip and Idris sent secret correspondence to Axunop, informing him that "now is the best opportunity to initiate a battle... [The Kashgar Bureau] must become the vanguards of the armed struggle and must unwaveringly march forth on the path of armed struggle."³⁷⁵ Yet even as the Soviets appeared to be providing an opportunity, time was not on the rebels' side. The new round of mass arrests crippled the local organization before Axunop could even organize a response to the letter's call.

Axunop himself, however, managed to avoid the fate of his colleagues. Soldiers did come to his home in the middle of the night on August 18 in order to arrest the Kashgar Bureau leader. As they were rummaging his home for incriminating evidence, however, his eldest daughter Adalet screamed at the sight of the armed men in the house, thus creating a diversion in which Axunop was able to escape into the blackness of night. Over the next

³⁷⁴ See Abdurreshid Haji Kërimi (2006), p. 97.

³⁷⁵ See Ma Dazheng 马大正 (2003), p. 44. See also Ma Dazheng 马大正 and Xu Jianying 许建英 (2006), p. 117.

day, he found temporary shelter hiding out in the homes and businesses of sympathizers who lived throughout the city. Meanwhile, through these contacts, he spread word to XIP's membership that there would be an urgent meeting on August 19 at the home of Qurban Niyaz in the village of Semen (*Seman* 色满), located in Kashgar's northwest.³⁷⁶ It was at this meeting that Axunop revealed his concrete plans in regards to the time and place for the Kashgar Bureau to act. He had formulated the three possible aforementioned lines of attack. They would either stay put to cause disturbances in their respective villages and cities, they would head south to a rallying point in the Karakorum Mountains near Tashkorgan, or they would head west to a rallying point in the Pamirs. Given the circumstances at the time, Axunop decided that it would be safest to gather towards the west. Partisans from throughout the region would convene in Sughunchaza on the evening of August 21 at 11:00. From there they would move together towards the mountains and occupy a plot of land along the border. This base territory would be declared the initial grounds of an independent Eastern Turkistan, where they could meet the Turkistan Liberation Army and begin conquest of the Tarim Basin.³⁷⁷

Axunop's order of August 19 marked the start of a large-scale XIP mobilization in the Kashgar area. Three days earlier on August 16, however, partisans in the village of Barin (*Baren xiang* 巴仁乡), in Aqtu County some sixty kilometers to the south of Kashgar City, had already acted. Undeterred by the warnings of the penalties for theft laid out in the July 23 Proclamation, several hundred men under the leadership of Eziz Osman raided the local armory, stealing a large trove of military weapons. While they encountered some resistance,

³⁷⁶ See Abdurreshid Haji Kërimi (2006), pp. 98-101.

³⁷⁷ See Abdurreshid Haji Kërimi (2006), pp. 101-102. See also Ma Dazheng 马大正 and Xu Jianying 许建英 (2006), p. 118, and Ma Dazheng 马大正 (2003), p. 44.

an even larger group returned on August 20 under the leadership of Muhemmed Eysa. In what was referred to as the “August 20 Incident,” they moved to collect whatever weapons remained in Aqtu County. With these actions, they forced the Chinese presence in Barin to retreat, allowing XIP full control of both the village and a good part of Aqtu County, where they then established a new “government of Eastern Turkistan.”³⁷⁸

In the weeks following the July 23 Proclamation, the Southern Xinjiang Military District dispatched work teams daily to the headquarters of the Zerepshan Brigade in Mekit County in an attempt to convince the mass organization to give up its weapons and fall in line with the spirit of the proclamation. Zerepshan leader Muhemmed Imin Qadir repeatedly stated that he would comply only if his Han counterparts did the same. As a result, by the time that Axunop gave the order on August 19 for XIP’s branch organizations to converge in Sughunchaza, the Zerepshan Brigade was still quite well armed. When the military district work group dropped by the organization’s headquarters on August 21, they discovered that neither its members nor its weapons caches were at the site. Because of this absence, the military district went on high alert and began a manhunt for the heavily armed, non-compliant mass organization. Muhemmed Imin Qadir had ordered his partisans to meet early in the morning in the town of Awat (*Awati* 阿瓦提) located forty kilometers north of Mekit in Maralbeshi County.³⁷⁹ Ma Dazheng and Abdurreshid Haji Kërimi differ somewhat on exactly how many heeded the call to meet in Awat. Kërimi writes that 45 showed up before the brigade needed to leave in order to make its 11:00 rendezvous time in Sughunchaza. On the road, the brigade hijacked a cargo truck, removing the merchandise

³⁷⁸ See Abdurreshid Haji Kërimi (2006), p. 109. See also “Gërmaniyidiki uyghurlar barin inqilabining 20 yilliqini xatirilidi” (Uyghurs in Germany Remember the Twentieth Anniversary of the Barin Revolution). *Radio Free Asia*. 5 April 2010. http://www.rfa.org/uyghur/xewerler/tepsili_xewer/girnaniyide-barin-shehitliri-04052010205130.html (Accessed 4 March 2013).

³⁷⁹ See Abdurreshid Haji Kërimi (2006), pp. 110-112.

out of the back only to be replaced with weapons and soldiers. Ma, on the other hand, claims that there were seventy partisans, and that they commandeered two cargo trucks rather than one.³⁸⁰

Unfortunately for Muhemmed Imin Qadir, his face and the Zerepshan Brigade were by this point fairly well-known throughout Mekit and Maralbeshi Counties. People recognized him when his vehicle stopped along the road for food or other reasons. Investigators from the Southern Xinjiang Military District were not far behind him, and witnesses were able to both identify him and also indicate the direction he was moving. Before long, a plainclothes officer, on a tractor and dressed as a herder guiding his livestock, detected and began tailing the truck as it traveled towards its destination. He was under strict orders, however, to not stop the rebel soldiers. It would be more useful to observe and to see just where they would lead him. When it became clear that the soldiers were following the road to Sughunchaza, the military district sent vehicles and troops to block the road.³⁸¹

On the evening of August 21, Axunop arranged for a cargo truck to make the rounds of Kashgar to pick up partisans from a series of prearranged locations. From there they were transported two hours to the vicinity of Sughunchaza and told to exit the vehicle and wait; the truck, packed with food, weapons, and supplies, was supposed to return soon. The partisans waited in the dead of night in an isolated stretch of desert, but there was no news. Meanwhile, from the direction of Sughunchaza, they heard gunfire.³⁸² As the Zerepshan Brigade approached Sughunchaza, it was greeted with a military blockade. The soldiers

³⁸⁰ See Abdurreshid Haji Kërimi (2006), p. 111-112. See also Ma Dazheng 马大正 and Xu Jianying 许建英 (2006), p. 118.

³⁸¹ See Abdurreshid Haji Kërimi (2006), p. 113.

³⁸² See Abdurreshid Haji Kërimi (2006), pp. 104-106.

inspected the rebel army's truck, and then ordered everyone out of the back, reassuring them that they would not be harmed if they turned over their arms peacefully. Muhemmed Imin Qadir was not prepared to give up without a fight, and he did what he could to mobilize his troops to face the military blockade. A military confrontation at this point had not been expected, however, and the Zerepshan Brigade was not yet prepared for battle. In the ensuing firefight, five were killed and all of the rest of the rebel fighters were injured or captured, thus neutralizing the fighting force from Mekit County. Meanwhile, the supply truck from Kashgar approached Sughunchaza along the same road, carrying another load of XIP partisans towards the rendezvous point. As they approached the military blockade, Chinese soldiers stopped their truck and told them that they could not pass until a matter on the road ahead was resolved. From the truck, they witnessed the firefight, and saw that there were soldiers all over. A number of them abandoned the vehicle and slipped away in the darkness towards the mountains.³⁸³

In the light of morning, some of those who had fled the scene of the fight, including Commander Mijit, Heyrulla, and a female partisan by the name of Meryem, found their way to join up with Axunop and his men. They explained what they had witnessed and, realizing that further help would not be forthcoming, the group of rebels walked northward towards the village of Karajul, located some fifty kilometers from the Soviet border. At dawn on August 23, Axunop's band of XIP partisans arrived to a hilltop tamarisk grove overlooking the village. They had neither eaten nor slept nor had water to drink since August 21, so by this point their bodies had been taxed by the elements. Nonetheless, there was urgent work

³⁸³ Abdurreshid Haji Kërimi and Ma Dazheng differ somewhat regarding the timing of the PLA battle with the Zerepshan Brigade. Kërimi suggests that a firefight would have taken place late on August 21 or early morning on August 22. Ma Dazheng indicates that the battle took place on August 23. See Abdurreshid Haji Kërimi (2006), pp. 107-108, 113-115. See also Ma Dazheng 马大正 and Xu Jianying 许建英 (2006), p. 118.

to do. The partisans would split into two groups. The first would establish control of the village. The second would occupy the nearby stable yard, from where they would steal horses to form a cavalry. The cavalry would then make its way to the Soviet border in order to clear the route of Chinese border guards. The first group in Karajul would use the village radio station to make a formal announcement declaring the independence of Eastern Turkistan, to appeal to locals to join in the fight, and to make a signal to the Soviet-based Turkistan Liberation Army that they were ready.³⁸⁴

The Southern Xinjiang Military District, however, was not far behind them. When Commander Mijit and his companions abandoned their truck near the site of the firefight, they had left in its cargo bed a large number of supplies, including weapons, party literature, and Eastern Turkistan flags.³⁸⁵ Ma Dazheng writes of the preponderance of evidence that Chinese investigators found on the scene following the battle.

[They] apprehended 48 machine guns, submachine guns, and rifles, more than 940 bullets, and a large number of other weapons and supplies. They also collected a large quantity of criminal proof, including the *Constitution* of the “Eastern Turkistan People’s Revolutionary Party,” the *Party Program*, and its *Declaration of Independence*.³⁸⁶

This evidence sent the military towards the Soviet border to hunt down those who had evaded capture. By the late afternoon of August 23, they entered Karajul village. On the rebel perch dispersed in the hilltop tamarisk grove, meanwhile, the rebels rested their exhausted bodies in the shade of the trees. They had decided that they would move on Karajul in the early evening. In the village itself, however, the presence of this band of

³⁸⁴ See Abdurreshid Haji Kërimi (2006), p. 116-118.

³⁸⁵ See Abdurreshid Haji Kërimi (2006), pp. 119-120.

³⁸⁶ See Ma Dazheng 马大正 and Xu Jianying 许建英 (2006), p. 118.

outsiders had not gone unnoticed. When Chinese investigators asked, villagers pointed them in the direction of the hill.³⁸⁷

The sounds of heavy gunfire awakened the XIP partisans where they rested. Meryem, who had been standing guard for the group when the Chinese attack started, was the first to be shot and killed. She was followed soon after by another. The rebels, still confused and disoriented from their physical exhaustion, scrambled to organize themselves. Loud speakers from the direction of Karajul assured the fighters that if they confessed, they would be treated with lenience; if they resisted, they would be severely punished. The Chinese soldiers outnumbered them and had more advanced equipment. Most of the rebels were carrying little more than revolvers, having left the best of their military weaponry in the truck when it was abandoned. Nonetheless, from their hilltop location, they enjoyed a strategically superior geographic location from which to repel a Chinese attack. When the XIP partisans failed to surrender after being given guarantees of safety, PLA soldiers advanced up the hillside into the tamarisk grove. As Axunop's troops fired down on the soldiers, frightened infantrymen dropped their weapons and ran in the opposite direction, allowing the rebels to collect their more advanced weaponry. Shortly after, a second wave of soldiers began making its way up the hill. In this assault, Commander Mijit was fatally wounded, making him the third rebel fatality. By this point, the XIP fighters hoped merely to hold off the attack until nightfall, when they could sneak away. However, when the third assault began, powered with automatic weapons, it became clear that they were defeated.³⁸⁸

³⁸⁷ See Abdurreshid Haji Kërimi (2006), pp. 119-120.

³⁸⁸ See Abdurreshid Haji Kërimi (2006), pp. 119-129.

In the course of battle, five partisans were killed – including Axunop – and many more were arrested.³⁸⁹

A diminished XIP apparatus remained in place after the battle in Karajul, but the PLA had now dealt the organization a fatal blow. Barring an actual Soviet attack on China, domestic hopes of wresting control of Xinjiang away from the People's Republic grew ever more remote. Yet, even as XIP's optimum opportunity had passed, the prospect of war between China and the Soviet Union had not diminished. The US State Department struggled to make sense of Davydov's confession that the Soviet Union was considering a surgical strike against China. In a secret telegram dated August 21, Washington alerted its posts in London, Moscow, New Delhi, Paris, Tokyo, and Hong Kong that, "To our knowledge, this is the first time any Soviet official has mentioned to a US official the possibility of taking out Chinese nuclear installations. Davydov... has [in the past] frequently advanced speculations and assumptions to test reactions." The US government by this point had not yet ironed out exactly how it would respond to the prospect of Soviet aggression against China. Still, it was trying to determine just how seriously it should take this possibility. "Davydov's effort to elicit US reaction in this matter could be the first in a series of probes," the telegram continues. "Addressee posts are requested to report any similar probes immediately. In view of the sensitivity of subject matter and our inability to make any conclusive assessment of Davydov's remarks, posts should refrain from initiating any soundings on this subject."³⁹⁰

³⁸⁹ See Ma Dazheng 马大正 and Xu Jianying 许建英 (2006), p. 118. Ma Dazheng reports that this battle occurred on the evening of August 22 in the area of Sughunchaza, rather than on August 23 in Karajul.

³⁹⁰ US State Department Cable 141208 to US Consulate Hong Kong, etc., 21 August 1969, from *National Security Archives*, "The Sino-Soviet Border Conflict, 1969: US Reactions and Diplomatic Maneuvers," document 11 (12 June 2001) <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB49/sino.sov.11.pdf> (Accessed 7 July 2013).

“Russia Reported Eyeing Strikes at China A-Sites,” read the headline of an eye-catching front-page article in the August 28 edition of the *Washington Post*.

Reports reaching Washington relating to a possible Soviet strike at the Chinese nuclear complex have increased Nixon administration alarm about the chances of war between the two Communist giants... Russians have been making discreet inquiries of some fellow Communist leaders, both those in power in Eastern Europe and some out of power in Western Europe, on what would be the reaction to such a Soviet strike... The inquiries were first made at the world Communist gathering in Moscow last June and later repeated at another place. That could not be ascertained yesterday... One key official who only a month earlier had rated the chances of a major Chinese-Soviet fight at about 10 percent recently said that the chances now are only slightly less than 50-50.

By thrusting the issue into the public, this White House press leak sought to force the Soviets to reconsider their position on how best to deal with China.

As viewed here there are at least three major possible Soviet tactics:

1. A punitive action such as an extensive border clash, initiated by Moscow as it is believed was the case last month in Central Asia, in which a large Chinese force would be destroyed by superior Soviet power.
2. Attempts to subvert the racial minority groups in [Xinjiang] on the Chinese side in Central Asia, where anti-[Beijing] feeling is thought to run high.
3. A preventative strike, by air or on the ground.

This latter, by far the most serious and thought likely to lead to major conflict if not all-out war, includes the strike at the Chinese nuclear complex about which the new reports are concerned. It is believed that such an attack would be with conventional bombs.³⁹¹

While these ideas already had some public currency during the months following the attack on Zhenbao Island – see, for example, the *Der Spiegel* article above – this article was

³⁹¹ See Chalmers Roberts, “Russia Reported Eying Strikes at China A-Sites,” *Washington Post* (28 August 1969): A1, A14.

exceptional in that it had behind it the weight of the American president. Nixon was concerned about this, and thus too should others be concerned.

China's leadership meanwhile was faced with the reality, in the midst of this talk of war with Soviet Union, of a counterrevolutionary party in Xinjiang of a size and scope that far exceeded any previous threat to its rule in that region. Yet the People's Revolutionary Party was not its only challenge. In three important regards, it was substantively different from armed mass organizations whose fighting continued to antagonize newly formed revolutionary authorities at every corner of the country. For one, it denied Mao's legitimacy. Second, it saw the Soviet Union as a valuable ally and not a threat. Third, it fought for secession from China. Yet, on its face, XIP did resemble other armed mass organizations. Even after the July 23 Proclamation, they too caused trouble, stole weapons, planned rebellions, and faced off against the PLA in battle. Absent the discovery of other evidence, including that which had been uncovered in Axunop's abandoned cargo truck, XIP's organizational plans and even the battle in Karajul might have been viewed as just another armed confrontation with an errant mass organization. Its ideology and intent were not outwardly obvious. Even as its separatist aims came to light, moreover, its treatment as a criminal organization differed little from the treatment of other groups during the same era.

On August 28, the Center issued yet another plea for armed mass organizations to give up their fighting, for the first time making a clear and explicit correlation between the need to disarm and the need to prepare for war.

The borders of our great motherland are sacred and inviolable. To defend the motherland is the sacred obligation of the whole country. To prepare to smash the armed provocations by the US imperialists and the Soviet Revisionists at any time, and to prevent them from launching sudden attacks [against our mother land], the Party Central Committee orders... in face of a formidable enemy, the whole army and the whole people should unite

together as one person, confronting the enemy with one stand... All activities to divide our own strength should be opposed. Any actions against unity should be opposed... The Party Central Committee's "July 23 Order" should be carried out resolutely... If any team for struggle by violent means continues to occupy a stronghold and stubbornly refuses to surrender, the People's Liberation Army can surround the stronghold by force, launch a political offensive toward it, and confiscate the weapons [held by the team] by force... In no circumstance should anyone be allowed to attack the People's Liberation Army. In no circumstances should anyone be allowed to seize the Army's weapons, equipment, and vehicles. In no circumstances should anyone hinder the Army's war preparations, or expose and steal military intelligence... Key military positions and war preparation facilities must be protected resolutely.

The fact that another general order like this was necessary suggests that the July 23 Proclamation had not had the intended effect – and it is possible that the battle in Karajul was one consideration that the general order's drafters kept in mind as they wrote the command. Indeed, the general order's ninth point appears to be directly aimed at XIP's activities: "The counterrevolutionaries who have connections with foreign countries or plan to escape abroad, who sabotage social safety and stability, who plunder state property, who sabotage production, who commit homicide, arson, poisoning, and who utilize feudal superstition to provoke rebellion must be suppressed without mercy."³⁹²

With each passing day following the battle in Karajul, Chinese security forces in Xinjiang grew more effective in their moves against what remained of XIP. New evidence collected from the scene of the battle led to new leads regarding the wider party apparatus, and in turn led to arrests of non-Han Xinjiangers at all levels of society. I earlier argued that non-Hans were more than mere passive victims of the Cultural Revolution in Xinjiang.

³⁹² See "The CCP Central Committee's Order for General Mobilization in Border Provinces and Regions," August 28, 1969, *History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Jianguo yilai Mao Zedong wengao* (Mao Zedong's Manuscripts since the Founding of the PRC), vol. 13, pp. 59-61. <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/110473> (Accessed 4 May 2016).

Although the movement promoted nationalities policies that were wrongheaded and assimilationist, it was not, as some have suggested, modeled as an outright assault on non-Han individuals. In fact, non-Hans were in many cases the perpetrators of the excesses that the era produced. This being said, starting with the crackdown on the Eastern Turkistan People's Revolutionary Party in late 1969, more and more people – some of whom had no association with the Eastern Turkistan movement – were being singled out on the basis of their *minzu* identities alone. Part of this shift can be explained by XIP's extensiveness in all layers of society, including within the PLA and the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party in Xinjiang. In this atmosphere, there was likely a great deal of mistrust towards anyone else who might have ties to the organization. Another part of the move towards the kinds of blanket accusations that emerged in late 1969 can be attributed to the transition from revolutionary chaos to post-revolutionary order. As authorities struggled to reestablish control over the situation, they discouraged and halted popular participation in the revolutionary process. From 1966 to 1969, non-Hans were more than victims – and were perpetrators – because the political atmosphere forced them into that role. From 1969, however, they lost that activist mandate, and thus in most cases could no longer be anything except passive.

The death of North Vietnamese leader Ho Chi Minh on September 2 brought a definitive end to any lingering hopes that the Soviet Union might swoop in to save XIP's bid for independence from China. In the midst of the Vietnam War, North Vietnam found itself caught in the middle of the Sino-Soviet Split. Allies with both China and the Soviet Union, Ho's Lao Dong Party could ill afford to alienate either by choosing sides. Maintaining neutrality, however, was a delicate balancing act, the stakes of which could mean, in the case of the Soviet Union, losing invaluable tactical support or, in the case of

China, drawing the ire of a large and powerful neighbor. At different times, both sides attempted to strong-arm the beleaguered Southeast Asian communist state into adopting a more committed position against the other. As early as 1963, Nikita Khrushchev had threatened to halt Soviet weapons support if the North Vietnamese did not abandon Beijing.³⁹³ A Chinese ultimatum in October of 1968 in turn threatened to sever ties with Ho's regime if it refused to spurn Moscow. The Vietnamese acceded to neither warning, and does not appear to have lost support because of it, although in November of 1968, the Chinese began recalling their military presence from their southern neighbor. This did not mark an outright rejection of the Hanoi regime, but did mark a transition from the Chinese offering active to more reluctant support. In a meeting with North Vietnamese Deputy Prime Minister Lê Thanh Nghi in Beijing on August 22 of 1969, Zhou Enlai used vague terms to express China's resoluteness in helping Hanoi, but at the same time avoided providing any specifics on how it would do so.³⁹⁴

The fracturing of the global communist movement was a matter of grave concern for Ho Chi Minh during his waning years. According to associates attending to his deathbed as the Vietnamese leader passed, one of his final wishes was that China and the Soviet Union find a peaceful resolution to their differences. This set the stage for Vietnam to serve as intermediary between the two states at just the time that the Soviet Union was still considering a surgical strike against China's nuclear facilities. Given the tensions between their two countries, Chinese and Soviet delegations at Ho Chi Minh's funeral were unwilling to speak directly, but North Vietnamese Prime Minister Pham Van Dong made separate

³⁹³ See Ang Cheng Guan, *The Vietnam War from the Other Side: The Vietnamese Communists' Perspective* (New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2002), pp. 78-79.

³⁹⁴ See Ang Cheng Guan, *Ending the Vietnam War: The Vietnamese Communists' Perspective* (Abingdon: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), pp. 26-28.

appeals to Zhou Enlai and Soviet Prime Minister Alexei Kosygin to meet and iron things out. Through Pham, on September 6, the Russian leader formally requested a face-to-face meeting with Zhou.³⁹⁵ Departing for home from Hanoi on September 11, Kosygin took a detour through Beijing, where he met with the Chinese leader. During the course of a three hour dialogue at the Beijing Airport, the two men discussed their border issues, amending the unequal treaties, and avoiding an armed conflict. “I showed Kosygin,” Zhou recounted to Romanian Prime Minister Ion Gheorghe Maurer at a meeting that took place fifteen minutes after the Russian leader had left, “that the flagrant violation of our land and air space, or the bombing of our nuclear facilities, will be considered acts of aggression and will mark the beginning of war... I told Kosygin that there are many, very many, too many problems, which would take not three hours to discuss but three months.”³⁹⁶

“The international situation has now changed.” In Almaty, General Margup Is’haqof of the Turkistan Liberation Army summoned Abit and Ayten in the late autumn to deliver the news. “The Soviet Union and China have begun bilateral talks, so the Soviet Union will not interfere in China’s internal affairs. Tell your comrades that the Soviet Union will not help with weapons.” Just like this, XIP’s two liaisons to the Central Asian Military District were told to return home, ending the formal collaboration between the Soviets and the People’s Revolutionary Party.³⁹⁷ Tensions between China and the Soviet Union remained quite high, and the specter of war continued to pervade Sino-Soviet relations for years to come, but the dismissal of XIP’s representatives from Almaty demonstrated a definitive shift

³⁹⁵ See Ang Cheng Guan (2003), p. 28-30. See also Joseph Alsop, “Chinese Communists Appear To Expect a Russian Attack,” *Washington Post* (10 Dec 1969): A17.

³⁹⁶ “Note of Conversation between Ion Gheorghe Maurer and Zhou Enlai on 11 September 1969,” September 11, 1969, *History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive*, A.N.I.C., *fond RCP CC—External Relations Division*, file 72/1969, f. 31-34, published in *Relatiile Romano-Chineze, 1880-1974* [Sino-Romanian Relations, 1880-1974], edited by Ioan Romulus Budura, (Bucharest, 2005), pp. 943-959, translated by Madalina Cristoloveanu, <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/117760> (Accessed 5 May 2016).

³⁹⁷ See Xodžamberdi (2008), p. 633.

in Soviet strategy away from the prospect of sponsoring a national liberation movement from within China's territory. Despite this, the Soviets did persist in using the Xinjiang issue to antagonize their Chinese rivals. The Turkistan Liberation Army and the Committee for the Liberation of Eastern Turkistan remained active within Soviet territory, but served primarily as tools to be wielded by propagandists such as Victor Louis at times when Moscow needed to put pressure on Beijing – as he did in his previously mentioned 1979 book *The Coming Decline of the Chinese Empire*. It was sensational and provocative rhetoric, to be sure, but by that point, the Soviet Union had long abandoned the domestic organizational structure that could make possible effective intervention within Xinjiang.

SEVEN

In the Aftermath

In his 1958 book *Sinkiang: Pawn or Pivot*, Allen Whiting asked whether the titular province truly was the “pivot of Asia,” as famously posited by American Sinologist and Central Asianist Owen Lattimore, or if it was a pawn in the Soviet Union’s game of geopolitics, as suggested by former governor Sheng Shicai. In retrospect, some within contemporary Uyghur diasporic communities fault the Soviets for using Xinjiang as a pawn. For years, they took advantage of sincere Turki desires for independence, while failing to take positive steps to demonstrate their commitment to making it happen. A sense of betrayal pervades many diasporic writings on the People’s Revolutionary Party. For example, one sympathetic blog post recounts that,

In 1969, the “Eastern Turkistan People’s Revolutionary Party” decided to start a comprehensive armed uprising against China’s brutal government and repression. It was a tactically and strategically sophisticated organization with its own political program, combative spirit, and organizational structure. It was an ideal political party. In order to receive tactical support from abroad, the Party Center sent messengers to the Soviet Union to secretly forge connections. Having these liaisons abroad and believing that they had true Soviet military support, the Party’s Central Committee decided to stage an armed revolt in the northern cities of Ghulja, Chöchek, Bortala, Altay, and Qaramay, scheduled to occur on June 29, 1969. The uprising would provide an opportunity for an armed incursion in the northern border areas, thus driving the Chinese into a panic. Afterwards, they had plans to organize an armed insurrection in Kashgar, with aims to finally establish an “Eastern Turkistan Republic” based out of that city, to announce it to the world, and to bolster their strength with the cooperation of sympathizers in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India. Ultimately, they would establish an Eastern Turkistan homeland forever free from the colonial rule of the Chinese Communists... Unfortunately, however, Soviet leaders – who have always sold the good fortune of the people of Eastern Turkistan to the Chinese – once again betrayed the people of Eastern Turkistan. Three days before the planned uprising, they sent “venerable gentlemen” to Beijing to report on the

impending uprising to the Chinese, in order to curry favor. With this information, Beijing mobilized more than a million security forces to begin rounding up people in every city, county, and village in Eastern Turkistan. Intellectuals, students, and patriotic workers were the first to be sent to prison. After being sold out by the traitors, the People's Revolutionary Party Central Committee was rounded up three days before the uprising.³⁹⁸

Qehriman Ghojamberdi voices a similar resentment of the Soviet posture, accusing them of “playing the Uyghur card” against China for personal gain, while ignoring the hopes and desires of the Uyghurs themselves.³⁹⁹

Others, however, are more forgiving. In a biographical tribute to his father Turghun Almas – an author who was placed under house arrest after his 1989 history book *The Uyghurs* (Uyghurlar) was determined to be ethnonationalist in nature – Kutluq Almas writes,

By the late 1960s, Sino-Soviet tensions came to the point of armed conflict. Hostilities started in January of 1967 and reached their nadir in March of 1969. Under the leadership of Mao Zedong, who at that time was referred to as the “number one adventurer,”⁴⁰⁰ China's antagonism towards the Soviet Union reached its limit. With animosity that rivaled that of China to itself, the Soviet Union took advantage of its military superiority – especially its nuclear superiority – and agitated to paralyze China with a nuclear attack. With that, from early 1968, the Soviets strengthened their moral and material support to the People's Revolutionary Party, expanding the scope of its activities throughout [Xinjiang], and strengthening preparations for a major armed uprising. The Soviet Union intended to start a nuclear assault against China in September of 1969. Before the start of the formal attack, on August 28 of that year, they revealed their plan to the United States requesting its neutrality. However, in its response, the Nixon administration declared that the United States would be unwilling to agree to the Soviet plan, and that if the Soviets started an attack, the United States would attack the Soviet Union in kind, with nuclear weapons. The United States further informed the Chinese of this Soviet plan through the *Washington Post*. Thus,

³⁹⁸ See “Sherqiy türkistan xelqining xitay kommunist qizil t  r  righa qarshi k  reshliri” (Struggles of the People of Eastern Turkistan against the Red Terror of the Communist Chinese), *Istiqlal radio xeber b  k  ti*, January 2004, <http://www.istiqlal.tv/radio/shownews.php?id=1175> (Accessed 4 March 2013).

³⁹⁹ See Xod  amberdi (2008), p. 625 and p. 627.

⁴⁰⁰ Soviet propaganda often derided Chairman Mao as an “adventurist,” a pejorative that was originally coined by Nikita Khrushchev in 1960.

the aforementioned Soviet plan never came into fruition. Likewise, this comprehensive uprising of the People's Revolutionary Party never came to be.

Kutluq's relatively more measured language regarding the nature of the Soviet relationship with the non-Hans of Xinjiang reveals a belief that they had the best interests of the People's Revolutionary Party in mind, but that circumstances would just not allow their intentions to be realized. He further gives the Soviets credit for elevating the international profile of the independence movement. "Before the United Nations, the Soviets presented the true facts of the Chinese government's colonial bloodletting in our homeland. In face of the crimes against humanity perpetuated by the Chinese government, the international community widely pressured and criticized China, forcing the Chinese government to halt its atrocities in Eastern Turkistan."⁴⁰¹

Both viewpoints regarding the Soviet Union have some merit. On the one hand, to the credit of Kutluq Almas's relatively more conciliatory view of Soviet contributions to the cause, it is true that the tone of Soviet propaganda regarding Xinjiang during this era – and the presentations of those views before a global audience – formed the foundations of later international criticisms of Chinese policies in Xinjiang. The stories reported in Soviet articles – detailing oppression, cultural assimilation, and the unjust treatment of non-Han communities – are in many regards reflected in contemporary accounts of human rights in the region as filtered through Western governments and non-governmental organizations. As relations between China and the Soviet Union deteriorated, censorship of anti-Chinese dissident voices were loosened, allowing a platform from which refugees could tell their

⁴⁰¹ See Kutluq Almas, "Meshhur Edip, Tarixshunas, Shair Hem Ulugh Inqilabchi – Turghun Almas" (Famous Writer, Historian, Poet, and Great Revolutionary – Turghun Almas), *Uyghuristan* (Blog), 19 February 2010, http://hantengri.blogspot.com/2010_02_01_archive.html (Accessed 6 March 2013).

stories. For its part, the United States operated similar propaganda campaigns against China from South Asia, in the forerunner to *Radio Free Asia*, but by virtue of its geographic proximity to Xinjiang, the Soviet Union enjoyed unique access to information concerning that region and its inhabitants. Thus, thirty years before *Radio Free Asia* would open its Uyghur language news service, the Soviets were providing somewhat detailed information of rights abuses within Mao-era Xinjiang. Just how much influence did these reports actually have outside of the Soviet Union? Considering the source – and the Soviet Union’s own deplorable human rights record – they came across as disingenuous and did not amount to much. Nonetheless, even after the Soviets withdrew their military support of national liberation, they maintained steadfast in posing a moral case for the world to take an interest in Xinjiang.

On the other hand, whether it subsequently built an international case for Eastern Turkistan or not, the Soviet decision to withdraw from its commitments with XIP after long stringing the partisans along with promises of a sponsored national liberation movement ultimately left true believers vulnerable and unprotected in the recriminations that followed. Over the ensuing months, emboldened and reinforced Chinese security forces swept Xinjiang’s cities, counties, and villages for XIP sympathizers. Accounts from the Eastern Turki diaspora report the number of those apprehended in the tens of thousands. Ma Dazheng gives a more prosaic and precise count of 5,869, of whom 365 were given severe sentences to serve as examples for the others. Out of these 365, he claims, 32 were executed, 198 were given prison terms, and 135 were “handled by other means.”⁴⁰² As much as the numbers from the Uyghur diaspora are almost certainly exaggerated, the numbers reported in China may be understated. As I previously reported, the cases were all

⁴⁰² See Ma Dazheng 马大正 (2003), p. 45.

retrospectively reevaluated in 1975, and only the most severe offenders and those who had already been executed were officially recognized as members of the People's Revolutionary Party. Was this fact reflected in the statistics reported by Ma? The answer to this question is unclear, but it is quite possible – and even probable – that this is the case. Once again, in reporting on XIP in Chinese secondary sources, the only specific names of members that are given are those who were unrepentant and who were already deceased before their cases could be reevaluated. Still, even amending the count according to this criteria, the statistic of 32 executed in association with the party would remain unchanged.

For his part, Abdurreshid Haji Kërimi casts some doubt on this statistic. In the aftermath of the battle in Karajul, he was arrested and detained along with many fellow partisans and sympathizers of the party. He reports that the names, mugshots, dates, and venues of impending executions were posted on the walls of the jail, for all to see. On July 18, 1970, alone, he states, 78 people associated with XIP were slated for public executions in cities and townships throughout Xinjiang, and by the end of 1970, he saw at least one hundred names listed for condemned comrades.⁴⁰³ This number cannot be independently verified from available sources; the *Xinjiang Daily* does not appear to have reported on this particular day's activities. Even the execution of one hundred criminals, moreover, while being a number significantly greater than 32, is still a fairly modest proportion of the thousands who were arrested. All of this can be explained in the politics underlying the move towards capital punishment in Xinjiang at that time. Public executions were prescribed as a part of the nationwide "One Strike, Three Anti Campaign" (*yi da san fan yundong* 一打三反运动) that unfolded in 1970. This movement was yet another attempt to

⁴⁰³ See Abdurreshid Haji Kërimi (2006), pp. 154-175.

restore order to a situation that remained chaotic well into the new year. Factionalism continued to destabilize China and further complicate efforts to revitalize an economy disrupted by revolution. Beijing was relatively calm, but there were reported disturbances in Henan, Shandong, Shanxi, Inner Mongolia, Yunnan, Guizhou, and Sichuan, among others. In face of chronic and debilitating instability, the Center decided that more drastic measures were needed.⁴⁰⁴

On January 31, the Chinese Communist Party Central Committee issued a “Directive Regarding the Crackdown on Counterrevolutionary Sabotage.” In this, it identified the target of the titular “one strike” in the unfolding campaign.

Active counterrevolutionaries are the emphasis of the crackdown. [Local governments] must firmly suppress those active counterrevolutionaries who fraternize with foreign enemies and commit treason, plot insurrection, collect military intelligence, steal state secrets, commit murder and violent crime, commit arson and poison people, attack others for revenge, maliciously assault the Party and the socialist system, steal state property, or disrupt social stability.

XIP clearly met the criteria laid out here. The use of public executions in Xinjiang, moreover, as reported by Kërimi, did not come in a vacuum. The directive later states,

[Local governments] must extensively and with great fanfare disseminate propaganda and mobilize. Before execution and sentencing, the masses must be provided with an explanation, for “when it is common knowledge, everyone will understand.” A mass rally shall be convened at the time of the executions and sentences, where the verdicts will be openly announced and punishments immediately carried out. Doing it in this manner will satisfy the people’s desires and will intimidate the enemies.

⁴⁰⁴ See MacFarquhar and Schoenhals (2006), p. 301.

However, as an explanation for the seemingly limited number of these public executions that were ultimately carried out, the directive adds that local governments “cannot carry out too many executions. Very few should be killed. Few also should be imprisoned. The majority shall be placed under surveillance.”⁴⁰⁵ The targets of the crackdown were later expanded to include measures against graft, profiteering, and waste – the “three antis.”

Based on reports from the *Xinjiang Daily*, the bulk of crackdowns on “active counterrevolutionaries” in Xinjiang occurred during a month-long period from mid-February to mid-March. The language used in describing these mass rallies was vague enough to suggest that People’s Revolutionary Party members could have been among the accused. For example, an Urumqi mass rally reported on February 18 explains that,

Just as the Soviet revisionists were colluding with the American imperialists to conduct a strategic attack on our nation, a small number of counterrevolutionaries also took advantage of the situation to further their own disruptive aims. In the present class struggle, this is a new trend that is worthy of notice. Some within this small group of counterrevolutionaries used the fear of war to spread rumors and mislead the people. Some of them stole state secrets in the service of our enemies. Some of them formed secret networks with plots to stage insurrections. Some engaged in corruption, theft, and profiteering, subverting the socialist economy. Some took the opportunity to reverse the verdicts of history and refused to accept submitting to control. Some of them have subverted the transfer of youths and cadres to the countryside. In short, they are unrestrained in their vileness and pose a grave danger.⁴⁰⁶

⁴⁰⁵ See “Zhonggong zhongyang guanyu daji fangeming pohuai huodong de zhishi” 中共中央关于打击反革命破坏活动的指示 (CCP Central Committee Resolution Regarding Cracking Down on Counterrevolutionary Sabotage), *Zhongfa* [1970] 3 (31 January 1970), found on *Meng Fangui-Su Lami de boke* 孟凡贵-苏拉密的博文 (1 September 2013), http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_67dbd70d0101aw16.html (Accessed 18 April 2016). See also MacFarquhar and Schoenhals (2006), p. 301.

⁴⁰⁶ See “Jianjue zhenya xianxing fan geming, jin yi bu gonggu wuchan jieji zhuanzheng” 坚决镇压现行反革命进一步巩固无产阶级专政 (Resolutely Suppress the Active Counterrevolution; Further Strengthen the Dictatorship of the Proletariat), *Xinjiang ribao* 新疆日报 (18 Feb 1970): 1.

A March 4 Urumqi mass rally added additional categories to the ranks of the “active counterrevolutionaries,” some of which potentially could be applied in describing XIP. “Some secretly formed illicit ties and organized counterrevolutionary cliques... Some wore the cloak of religion to advance *minzu* separatism and to undermine the unity of the homeland.”⁴⁰⁷ Yet these reports lacked specificity about the crimes of the accused. One phrase might plausibly suggest the activities of a separatist group such as the People’s Revolutionary Party, while the next might describe something completely unrelated, such as economic crimes. In neither case did the official press go into detail.

According to Ma Dazheng and Xu Jianying, after the battle in Karajul, “Xinjiang’s Public Security Bureau, according to law, disposed of and punished the ‘Eastern Turkistan People’s Revolutionary Party’ on a regional scale. By March of 1970, the entire case had been uncovered.”⁴⁰⁸ Ablikim Baqi Iltebir agrees that the bulk of the party had been dismantled by that date.⁴⁰⁹ Considering that this was also the tail end of the spate of *Xinjiang Daily* articles chronicling mass rallies and essays related to the “One Strike, Three Anti” campaign, the connection between the crackdown on XIP and the crackdown associated with the movement is likely more than coincidental. This was not, however, the end of “One Strike, Three Anti,” nor was it the end of new arrests associated with the People’s Revolutionary Party. Nationwide, the former continued through 1970, and in some locales would not even begin to slow down until as late as 1973. By November of 1970, some 284,800 people had been arrested in association with the campaign.⁴¹⁰ In Xinjiang, arrests

⁴⁰⁷ See “Jianjue de jiang yiqie fan geming fenzi zhenya xiaqu; shi women de geming zhuanzheng da da de gonggu qilai” 坚决地将一切反革命分子镇压下去；使我们的革命专政大大地巩固起来 (Resolutely Suppress All Counterrevolutionaries; Further Strengthen Our Revolutionary Dictatorship), *Xinjiang ribao* 新疆日报 (5 March 1970, evening edition): 1.

⁴⁰⁸ See Ma Dazheng 马大正 and Xu Jianying 许建英 (2006), p. 119.

⁴⁰⁹ See Ablikim Baqi Iltebir (1999), pp. 149-150.

⁴¹⁰ See MacFarquhar and Schoenhals (2006), pp. 306-307.

related to XIP continued at least through the late summer of 1970. In reporting on his father's detention in association with the party, Kutluq Almas indicates that Turghun Almas was arrested in August of 1970.⁴¹¹

Henceforth, thousands or even tens of thousands of XIP members were kept in custody for their involvement with the organization. Unsurprisingly, it is clear from firsthand accounts that prison life was unpleasant – sometimes deadly – for the accused. Be that as it may have been, however, it does not appear that the People's Revolutionary Party was treated in a manner substantively different from that of other more conventional errant mass organizations. Perhaps nothing better demonstrates this point than the fact that a large number of XIP prisoners had their sentences commuted starting in August of 1975. As the Chinese Communist Party attempted to come to terms with the detrimental effects that the Cultural Revolution had brought the nation as a whole – and later as it moved to “thoroughly negate” the policies of the Cultural Revolution – the records of those involved with the People's Revolutionary Party were expunged, and the party's memory too was negated. The fact that several former XIP members – including Ablikim Baqi Iltebir, Abdurreshid Haji Kërimi, Sabit Abdurrahman, and Ahmed Egemberdi – were later released from prison, and moreover were able to move into the global diaspora, is a testament to a degree of relative lenience that was employed in the Chinese management of this case. By comparison, it is nearly unthinkable to imagine present-day convicted Eastern Turkistan independence activists being released early from prison, nor certainly ever again having the liberty to travel abroad.

Variations on a Theme: The Inner Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party

⁴¹¹ See Kutluq Almas (2010).

This lenience was unusual for the era as well. The infamous crackdown against the “Inner Mongolian People’s Revolutionary Party” – an alleged separatist organization that was accused of seeking a pan-Mongol union with the Mongolian People’s Republic also during the Cultural Revolution – resulted in a number of deaths that, while information varies by source, certainly exceeded ten thousand.⁴¹² The magnitude of difference between the two cases can be partially attributed to timing. The campaign against the Inner Mongolian Party was initiated by Inner Mongolia’s Revolutionary Committee in late 1967. Beginning in the summer of 1966, the autonomous region’s long-term ethnic Mongol leader Ulanhu had been faulted for pursuing policies favorable to its Mongol populations, seeking the kinds of limited concessions that the constitution theoretically guaranteed for autonomous regions “according to local conditions.” In language that reflected criticisms against Wang Enmao in Xinjiang during the same period, he was said to be seeking to “establish an independent kingdom” outside the Center’s control.⁴¹³ Talk of an “independent kingdom,” however, meant two entirely different things when referring to the desires of an ethnic Han such as Wang versus those of an ethnic Mongol such as Ulanhu. Wang’s “independent kingdom” would be one that was ideologically heterodox, seeking to avoid adherence to the spirit of dictates from the Center. Ulanhu’s “independent kingdom,” however, could plausibly be interpreted literally as a physical independent kingdom, separate from China and possibly in collusion with revisionists in the Soviet Union and the Mongolian People’s Republic. By virtue of his *minzu* identity, he was suspect.

⁴¹² See Tumen 图门 and Zhu Dongli 祝东力, *Kang sheng yu “neirendang” yuan’an* 康生与“内人党”冤案 (Kang Sheng and the Unjust Case of the “Inner Mongolian People’s Revolutionary Party”) (Beijing: Zhonggong zhongyang dangxiao chubanshe, 1995), p. 2.

⁴¹³ See Brown (2006), p. 74.

Sure enough, the campaign to seize power in Inner Mongolia very quickly devolved into an ethnically charged popular witch-hunt against Ulanhu and the region's other ethnic Mongol leaders, who were accused of harboring intent to separate Inner Mongolia from China. Yet despite this early racially demagogic trajectory, the rollout of the Cultural Revolution in Inner Mongolia was relatively tame prior to the formation of its revolutionary committee in November of 1967. Compared with Xinjiang and other locales throughout China, Inner Mongolia before that event had had limited numbers both of weapons and of revolution-related casualties. With the founding of the revolutionary committee, however, Mongol separatism proved a salient issue against which the military and Inner Mongolia's rival rebel organizations could find common ground. Thus when a low-ranking Mongol cadre by the name of Ulaanbagana – himself a former associate of Ulanhu and member of the pre-Liberation Inner Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party – approached the revolutionary committee with purported evidence of a vast Mongol separatist conspiracy, the allegations set the Cultural Revolution in the region along a deadly path. The culprit behind this plot, he revealed, was the Inner Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party.⁴¹⁴

The parallels between the Inner Mongolian and Eastern Turkistan People's Revolutionary Parties go beyond the obvious similarities in their names. Both were pre-Liberation Marxist political parties that later merged with the Chinese Communist Party, their memberships absorbed into the core of local non-Han bureaucracies within the People's Republic. Not so fast, Ulaanbagana claimed, however – the Inner Mongolian Party continued to exist underground, and for years had been plotting actively to reclaim the region from China and to join their conationals in the Mongolian People's Republic. This

⁴¹⁴ See David Sneath, *Changing Inner Mongolia: Pastoral Mongolian Society and the Chinese State* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 109-111.

was the story too that accompanied the Eastern Turkistan Party – it continued operating clandestinely even after it claimed to have been dissolved. He further asserted that former members of the Inner Mongolian Party, exemplified by Ulanhu himself, adopted roles within the Chinese bureaucracy while at the same time continuing to operate as agents behind the scenes for the causes of their former party. Such also was the case for the former leadership of the Eastern Turkistan Party in Xinjiang – bear in mind that the whole of the former party’s leadership was purged, save Seypidin Ezizi. Both parties were allegedly vast, with memberships permeating all levels of local Party and military leadership. Both were waiting for the right opportunity, and both found it in the chaos of the Cultural Revolution. Inner Mongolia’s Revolutionary Committee Chairman Teng Haiqing 滕海清 in 1968 spoke of the Inner Mongolia Party in words that too could have been spoken by Xinjiang Revolutionary Committee Chairman Long Shujin 龙书金 in 1969 or 1970 about the Eastern Turkistan Party: “The enemy is using religion and plays upon national feeling in order to bring disaster to the great Cultural Revolution.”⁴¹⁵

On the surface, in view of what we now know about the Eastern Turkistan People’s Revolutionary Party, it is not unreasonable to imagine that this conspiracy could have had some basis in fact. The Mongols of Inner Mongolia likely shared with their Turki counterparts in Xinjiang many of the same grievances regarding the manner and direction of Chinese power and policy in their territory. It is not inconceivable that disillusioned former Inner Mongolian partisans could have organized a new incarnation of their old party and additionally might have actively sought the sponsorship of the Soviets and their Outer Mongolian brethren. Soviet calculations for such a gamble too seem somewhat plausible.

⁴¹⁵ See Sneath (2000), p. 111.

As in Xinjiang, the Soviets and Mongols could have employed similar propaganda tactics to earn the trust of non-Hans in Inner Mongolia. Here was a sensitive border region wherein large swaths of territory were dominated by non-Han communities, some of which did not speak the Chinese language. Just as Xinjiang's Lop Nur was a test site for Chinese nuclear weapons, Baotou in Inner Mongolia was host to a uranium enrichment facility. Years before the Soviets organized the Central Asian Military District along the border with Xinjiang, they signed a defense treaty with Mongolia in 1966 that, as needed, would allow a significant Soviet military presence in Mongolian territory. As it turns out, China's increasingly aggressive posturing towards both the Soviets and the Mongolians did quickly serve as a pretext for a considerable Soviet buildup along the border with Inner Mongolia. New bases and airfields built in the Mongolian steppelands during the ensuing years would allow for a rapid response to any provocation.⁴¹⁶ Soviets would feasibly hope to accompany any potential military action with a destabilizing domestic uprising brought about by the region's Mongols.

While these conditions could have been conducive to the formation of a separatist organization such as the Inner Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party, there were nonetheless some notable differences between the Turkis of Xinjiang and the Mongols of Inner Mongolia. First of all, the proportion of Inner Mongolia's nearly thirteen million residents who were actually ethnic Mongols in 1966 was significantly smaller than their non-Han counterparts in Xinjiang. Just under fifteen percent of the region's population was Mongol in 1964, compared to over sixty percent Turki in Xinjiang during the same year.⁴¹⁷

⁴¹⁶ See Harrison Salisbury, "Will There Be War Between Russia and China?" *The New York Times* (27 July 1969): SM10.

⁴¹⁷ See *Zhonghua renmin gongheguo renkou tongji ziliao huibian, 1949-1985* 中华人民共和国人口统计资料汇编 1949—1985 (A Compilation of Demographic Data in the People's Republic of China, 1949-1985) (Beijing:

This distinction, however, can be deceptive; Han populations tended to be clustered in the region's cities and agricultural counties, while ethnic Mongols dominated in the vast, sparsely populated steppelands. Still, another important distinction between the Mongols and Turks was the respective prominence of one *minzu* identity versus another. While the overwhelming majority of Xinjiang's Turki peoples was native speakers of one or another Turkic language, many Mongols in Inner Mongolia spoke only Chinese and were largely assimilated. Such was the case with Ulanhu, as well as for many other Mongol intellectuals and city dwellers. Perhaps above all other factors, this casts doubt on any theory that presumes an Inner Mongolia Party existed, or at least that Ulanhu and his Mongol colleagues had any knowledge of such a plot. If they culturally identified with China, they would be less inclined to pursue a course that would sever that bond. Finally, Inner Mongolia was closer to the core of the Central States and, even historically, was not an exclusively Mongolian region. During different eras, it was alternatingly a primarily Mongol or Han region, and often was a mixture of the two. The relationship dynamic between the Central States and Inner Mongolia was thus more complex and nuanced than that between the Western Regions and the Central States. None of this, of course, precludes the possibility that a dissident party might have existed, but rather merely suggests that the conditions for such a movement in Inner Mongolia were less developed than in Xinjiang.

The campaign to eliminate the threat posed by the Inner Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party started in late 1967 and continued unimpeded through 1968 and into 1969. This period also witnessed some of the deadliest and most disruptive interfactional battles of the Cultural Revolution. The alleged counterrevolutionary organization was being

Zhongguo caizheng jingji chubanshe, 1988), p. 924. See also Shinjang uyghur aptonom rayonluq statistika idarisi (1989), p. 40.

targeted from many directions – from the regional government under the leadership of the newly-formed revolutionary committee, from the military, and from the still-active rival mass organizations that were so pervasive during these years. At this particular juncture, each of these competing investigative parties had incentive to outdo one another in demonstrating zeal to out the dissident party. A “supreme directive” prefaces one compilation of materials published in December of 1967, intended to be used as a source in adjudicating cases regarding the Inner Mongolian Party:

Representatives of the bourgeoisie who have wormed their ways into the Party, the government, the military, and the various cultural spheres are a group of counterrevolutionary revisionists. When they get the opportunity, they will seize power and transform the dictatorship of the proletariat into a dictatorship of the bourgeoisie. Some of these people have already been uncovered, but others have not. Some have earned our trust and are trained as our successors – people like Khrushchev. They lie in wait by our sides, and party committees at all levels must be vigilant about this.⁴¹⁸

Thus revealed the prevailing political atmosphere in Inner Mongolia when the campaign against the party started. People were urged to remain suspicious of their neighbors, even their closest comrades, and to drag suspected counterrevolutionaries into the open. In 1968, there was little constraint in conducting this manner of operation.

Hundreds of thousands of ethnic Mongols – already a significant minority of Inner Mongolia’s population – were arrested by one or another prosecuting organization. The brutality with which suspected partisans were treated was not particularly unusual for the era, but the exclusive singling out of a relatively small *minzu* community, in such a concentrated

⁴¹⁸ See *Nei menggu zhuan jiu hafenga lianluo weiyuanhui* 内蒙古专揪哈丰阿联络委员会 and *Nei meng yuwei, zhaxue shehui kexue yanjiusuo “dong fang hong”* 内蒙古语委、哲学社会科学研究所“东方红,” *Chedi fensui fandong minzuzhuyi de baolei – nei menggu renmin geming dang* 彻底粉碎反动民族主义的堡垒 - 内蒙古人民革命党 (Thoroughly smash the fortress of reactionary nationalism, the Inner Mongolian People’s Revolutionary Party) (1967).

manner and short period of time, elevates the nature of its associated abuses beyond just ordinary revolutionary chaos and into the neighborhood of genocide. Thus during two years that the Eastern Turkistan People's Revolutionary Party was still hiding largely unimpeded and in plain sight, an alleged Inner Mongolian Party was already being subjected to a relentless assault that was resulting in a large number of deaths. Ultimately, the Chinese Communist Party Center intervened during its Ninth Party Congress in April of 1969, forcing an end to the purge and criticizing Teng Haiqing for allowing the situation in Inner Mongolia to spiral so far out of control.⁴¹⁹ By the time that Chinese security forces moved against the Eastern Turkistan Party in June of that year, they were operating as more disciplined investigatory bodies, and thus, Xinjiang saw fewer casualties.

In the end, did the Inner Mongolian Party ever really even exist? In retrospective analysis on this question, the Inner Mongolian Party Committee reported,

In the wake of continuing developments on the situation and on the basis of a large number of facts that have come to light through the implementation of policies, we are led to see with ever more certainty that the so-called "New Inner Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party" simply never existed. To decide now to dig up the "New Inner Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party" was misguided. It was subjective and arbitrary, foolish and reckless – a miscarriage of justice created through the vigorous use of forced confessions by a segment of the former regional party leadership core under the influence of Lin Biao's and the "Gang of Four's" counterrevolutionary revisionist line. Therefore, it must be thoroughly negated.⁴²⁰

Just like that, the demagoguery and political opportunism that pervaded the campaign against the Inner Mongolian Party was laid bare. The entire affair was fabricated, and the

⁴¹⁹ See Brown (2006), p. 117.

⁴²⁰ See Nei menggu zizhiqu dangwei 内蒙古自治区党委, "Guanyu jin yi bu jiejue hao wa 'xin nei ren dang' wenti de yijian de baogao" 关于进一步解决好挖"新内人党"问题的意见的报告 (Report on Opinions Regarding Further Resolving the Problem of Rooting Out the "New Inner Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party") (1978), quoted in Tumen 图门 and Zhu Dongli 祝东力 (1995), pp. 1-2.

trauma and deaths it caused were the regrettable consequences of a serious revolutionary mistake.

The striking similarities between the details and circumstances behind the two alleged counterrevolutionary organizations initially led me to wonder if the Eastern Turkistan Party, like its Inner Mongolian counterpart, also “simply never existed.” Was it a fantasy generated by a regional leadership that was intent on bolstering its own power through identifying and exploiting a common domestic enemy? As interesting a proposition as this theory was, however, further digging led to contacts with former XIP members Abdurreshid Haji Kërimi and Ablikim Baqi Iltebir, whose accounts of their experiences within the Eastern Turkistan Party removed whatever doubts of its existence that knowledge of circumstances surrounding the Inner Mongolian Party might have introduced. Then I considered that my underlying assumption was wrong. The correlation might not have been that the Eastern Turkistan Party, like the Inner Mongolian Party, never existed. Rather, it is possible that the Inner Mongolian Party, like the Eastern Turkistan Party, did exist. This theory, however, lacks evidence. There are no former partisans claiming past associations with the organization, nor do any historians either in China or in the global diaspora make any claims as to its existence. Nonetheless, the case of the Inner Mongolian People’s Revolutionary Party demonstrates that the management of the Eastern Turkistan Party could have gone worse for Xinjiang’s Turkic communities.

Seypidin Ezizi – A XIP Sympathizer at the Helms?

Whereas in Inner Mongolia, denying the legacy of the Cultural Revolution involved criticizing the content and excessive nature of the campaign against the Inner Mongolian People’s Revolutionary Party, in Xinjiang, it involved criticism of the man who headed the

regional government during the waning years of that era – Seypidin Ezizi. Interestingly enough, if the campaign against the Inner Mongolian Party was condemned for having been wrongheaded and severe, Seypidin’s handling of alleged counterrevolutionaries was faulted as having been too lax. In discrediting the man whom Mao had early praised as a “good comrade” – a sentiment that insulated him from suspicion of separatist inclinations for the balance of the Cultural Revolution – Xinjiang’s post-Mao Party apparatus emphasized that he had a record of undermining Central directives, had actively used his power to protect separatist elements, and had expressed views sympathetic to *minzu* nationalism. Among the six surviving original Central Committee members of the People’s Revolutionary Party, Seypidin Ezizi alone navigated the Cultural Revolution relatively unscathed. The circumstances of his rise, survival, and fall, however, reveal in him a troubled figure whose steadfastness to the Maoist line, born of the necessity for self-preservation, ultimately earned him the derision both of the nationalist diaspora and the post-Mao regime. Ghojamberdi writes,

[Seypidin] escaped the fate of others who fell into the label of “vermin,” thanks to the personal patronage of Mao Zedong. Chairman Mao remembered well his contributions to neutralizing the Eastern Turkistan Republic and its army from 1949 and 1954, as well as his role in organizing mass repressions during the various campaigns of the 1950s. Such loyal puppets have always been needed in China, and he was still needed for the duration of the “Cultural Revolution” in Xinjiang.⁴²¹

⁴²¹ See Xodžamberdi (2008), p. 612-613.

Not surprisingly, Chinese post-revolutionary critique told quite a different story: “Seypidin advanced the counterrevolutionary revisionist line in Xinjiang, was involved in *minzu* separatism, and set up an independent kingdom.”⁴²²

Criticism of Seypidin centered on ten general themes: his close relationship with the “Gang of Four,” his contempt towards Mao’s successor Hua Guofeng 华国锋, his sabotage of the fight against revisionism in Xinjiang, his willingness to overlook transgressions in exchange for personal flattery, his inattention to developmental projects, his ideological alignment with *minzu* nationalists, his heterodoxy in regards to international affairs, his troubling political background, his privileged class background, and his bourgeois lifestyle. This was of course a smear campaign, and each of the charges should be interpreted with that context in mind, but nonetheless some of the points brought up in this critique are worth considering as they relate to the People’s Revolutionary Party. Moreover, the substance of some of these complaints elicits for me an important question, the answer to which I cannot answer with certainty: is it possible that Seypidin himself was complicit in the latter incarnation of the People’s Revolutionary Party? During the campaign against XIP, he was privileged and protected by Mao’s expressions of unwavering support; after Mao’s death, when charges could be more easily brought against him, policies regarding the People’s Revolutionary Party had changed, and former members were being exonerated for their allegiances to the organization. If he was in any way involved – or at least tacitly supportive – Xinjiang’s chairman could have reasonably slipped through the cracks, never to be publically acknowledged for his participation.

⁴²² See Shinjiang uyghur aptonom rayonluq dangwey ben’gongtingi, *Yoldash seypidinning ëghir lushiyeen xatalighigha da’ir matiriyallar toplimi* (A Collection of Materials Related to Comrade Seypidin’s Grave Political Mistakes) (22 Feb 1978), p. 17.

Seypidin had been a mainstay in Xinjiang's elite politics since liberation. His rise to the region's top post, however, was precipitated by a nationwide purge of Lin Biao's allies. Lin Biao 林彪, a major architect behind the Cultural Revolution, was formally designated to replace Liu Shaoqi as Mao's chosen successor at the Ninth Party Congress. The power structures put in place during the lead-up to and aftermath of that event were intended to bolster that claim, giving power to a retinue of cadres who would be loyal to Lin in the eventuality of Chairman Mao's death. Xinjiang Revolutionary Committee Chairman Long Shujin, a major general in the People's Liberation Army, was among this network of supporters. In September of 1971, however, in a betrayal that appears to have genuinely shocked the unshakeable Mao, Lin Biao unexpectedly fled China in an effort to defect, presumably towards Moscow. This ill-fated attempt would end in failure when Lin's plane crashed into the Mongolian steppe, killing all on board. Uncertain how to proceed, the Center in Beijing remained silent on this development until later that year. A propaganda spin was needed to explain this embarrassing turn of events and to repaint Lin as a negative character. In the process, his network of supporters was one-by-one removed from power. Just like that, in June of 1972, Long Shujin was out, and Seypidin was promoted.

Inasmuch as specific post-revolutionary criticisms against him were accurate, Seypidin's actions appear consistent with the behavior of a dual member of XIP and the Chinese Communist Party. During the Three Districts Revolution, People's Revolutionary Party Chairman Abdukërim Abbasof had encouraged the clandestine organization's membership to openly adopt official titles within the ruling regime, and to use those titles to promote underground partisan aims. This was one point of continuity between former and latter XIP organizations. When arrests started in June of 1969, Turki Communist Party officials, from prominent regional figures such as Muhemmet'imin Iminof to local village

heads, were found to simultaneously keep memberships in both parties. Of course it is possible that Seypidin's Turki comrades for whatever reason wished to keep their clandestine activities a secret from him – maybe, for example, he was a known informant, viewed as being too chummy with the Chinese Communists. On the other hand, he might always have been one of the subversives, and only avoided punishment for that identification by virtue of Mao's personal confidence in him. By the time that the wider crackdown on XIP was started, Seypidin would have been so far imbedded in the administration that he likely had little choice but to maintain the façade of unquestioning loyalty to Mao, even when that meant appearing as a traitor to his Turki countrymen. Even still, however, he could attempt to soften the blow for his incarcerated fellow partisans – including seeking their release and exoneration – and could obstruct projects that might draw Xinjiang closer to the interior. According to the charges brought up against him after he was removed from power, he employed both of these tactics.

In the early days following Liberation, as the model for an autonomous region in Xinjiang was being formulated, a relatively unguarded Seypidin Ezizi was forthright in offering unfiltered views regarding nationality and autonomy. These opinions echoed those of his XIP comrades Muhemmet'imin Iminof, Enwer Xanbaba, Es'et Is'haqof, Seydulla Seypullayof, and Abdulla Zakirof. First of all, the name "Xinjiang" denoted that the region had been conquered and was a colonial possession. It would be better, he argued, to designate Xinjiang the "Uyghurstan Republic," in recognition of the primary *minzu* living within its borders. Second, according to Seypidin, the tried and tested republican system that was used in the Soviet Union would be most appropriate in Xinjiang, and the rights to both self-determination and secession should be preserved. Third, the Uyghur language should be the primarily language of government and commerce within the region's borders,

and Chinese should only be used in communication with the Center. Fourth, cadres should be appointed demographically proportional to the sizes of their respective populations within each political boundary. Fifth, Seypidin insisted that the Eastern Turkistan Republic's National Army not be absorbed into the PLA, but rather remain as a separate force tasked with the defense of Xinjiang. Moreover, he opposed the formation of and later called for the dismantlement of the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps.⁴²³ If these charges are an accurate depiction of Seypidin's early views, then Qehriman Ghojamberdi is mistaken in his accusations that he played a significant role in "neutralizing the Eastern Turkistan Republic."

Ghojamberdi further suggests that Seypidin's rise to the pinnacle of power in the Xinjiang region was a reward for his "role in organizing mass repressions during the various campaigns of the 1950s." Once again, however, assuming that post-Mao critique is accurate, the notion that he played a significant role in the purges of prominent Turki individuals during the 1950s or even at the helms of regional government during the 1970s does not stand up to scrutiny. In Xinjiang, much of the thrust during the anti-rightist campaign of 1957 and 1958 was directed towards local nationalism. Fellow former XIP Central Committee members Muhemmet'imin Iminof, Seydulla Seypullayof, and Es'et Is'haqof were all targeted at this time. Seypidin is criticized, however, for both defending the accused and remaining tight-lipped about what he knew about their alleged crimes. He moreover is faulted for not acknowledging his own mistakes.⁴²⁴ Still, one assertion regarding Seypidin's behavior during the Cultural Revolution does justify some of Ghojamberdi's disapproval – Seypidin is accused of having revealed, for political reasons, certain members of the

⁴²³ See *Shinjang uyghur aptonom rayonluq dangwey ben'gongtingi* (1978), pp. 34-36.

⁴²⁴ See *Shinjang uyghur aptonom rayonluq dangwey ben'gongtingi* (1978), p. 39.

organization. These were individuals who had knowledge of Seypidin's unspecified "historical problem," whose removal from the public sphere would benefit him personally.⁴²⁵ Still, it must be remembered that it was on Seypidin's watch that the majority of cases involving the People's Revolutionary Party were resolved, that the crimes of those who were implicated were forgiven, and that the members began to be released.

Xinjiang in 1969 was so vulnerable to a Soviet advance in large part because it still lacked key infrastructural ties with the Chinese Interior. Twenty years after liberation, it remained a relatively undeveloped backwater. After China and the Soviet Union defused the tensions of that year, however, Beijing demanded that Xinjiang undergo a series of changes to address these shortcomings. Once again, according to the critical assessment of Seypidin promulgated in 1978, he failed to live up to these expectations and actively "defied, hindered, and slandered Chairman Mao's and the Party Central Committee's instructions regarding preparations for Xinjiang's battle against revisionism. Not only did he not support, but also blocked and subverted Xinjiang's development and stability."⁴²⁶ To some extent, this argument is bolstered by his alleged continued derision towards the Production and Construction Corps. The organization was tasked with engineering projects such as building airfields, developing border checkpoints, and building a rail line that would connect Urumqi with Xinjiang's southern oases. Seypidin used his authority to halt any kind of progress on these fronts, as well as to diminish the *Bingtuan* presence in the region. Perhaps it is more than just coincidence that the Production and Construction Corps was ultimately disbanded in 1975, under Seypidin's watch. The critique adds that "there were originally *Bingtuan* observers monitoring the Sino-Soviet border in south Xinjiang, but [Seypidin]

⁴²⁵ See *Shinjang uyghur aptonom rayonluq dangwey ben'gongtingi* (1978), pp. 23-24.

⁴²⁶ See *Shinjang uyghur aptonom rayonluq dangwey ben'gongtingi* (1978), p. 18.

annulled this presence, thus allowing Soviet revisionist spies to easily move back and forth across the border.”⁴²⁷ If Seypidin at this point still had any kind of sympathy for the goals of the People’s Revolutionary Party, each of these instances of action or inaction could be plausibly interpreted as having furthered the cause, even as his comrades languished in prison. Of course, any evidence suggesting Seypidin’s involvement with XIP at this point is purely circumstantial, but it is nonetheless a fascinating theory to consider.

Seypidin enjoyed a cushioned fall from grace after being removed from power in Xinjiang in February of 1978. From Urumqi he moved to Beijing, where for years he served as a vice-chair of the Standing Committee in the National People’s Congress. Nonetheless, it is clear from his writings that he nursed grievances, both from the reversal of his fortunes within the Chinese regime and also from the fact that he was now effectively shunned by his Uyghur and other Turki peers. Seypidin wrote a short story in 1981 that reveals some of these feelings of abandonment through a thinly veiled parable about a lowly frog who through flattery and obedience finds his way up to the rooster’s perch. His sycophancy delights the rooster, who thereupon names him the king of the pond. All the while, the rooster is unwilling to allow his frog friend to be his equal, and finds a higher perch from which to crow. From his new position as king, the frog alienates his peers and quickly learns that this new status is in reality devoid of any real meaning. With this realization, the frog king attempts to climb up to the rooster’s even higher perch, but stumbles as he climbs and plummets to his death. His unceremonious fall is met with shrugs from the rooster and scorn from his peers.⁴²⁸ Such was how Seypidin viewed his climb to the top of Xinjiang politics. He was the frog, toadying up to the rooster Mao. Even as his blind ambitions

⁴²⁷ See *Shinjang uyghur aptonom rayonluq dangwey ben’gongtingi* (1978), p. 19.

⁴²⁸ See Seypidin Ezizi, “Paqining qondaqqa chiqishi” (The Frog’s Ascent to the Perch), *Qeshqer edebiyati* (1983), pp. 98-104.

alienated his fellow countrymen, he earned formal titles, but in the end they were meaningless. In his ultimate figurative fall, Seypidin was both disgraced and reviled, filled with regret about his lost opportunity.

Frogs on the Perch

Yet as much as the parable of the frog's ascent to and fall from the rooster's perch could be autobiographical for Seypidin, if we consider the aforementioned theory that he was sympathetic to or even complicit in the case of the People's Revolutionary Party, it is also possible that he was telling a much wider story. The frog was not necessarily Seypidin Ezizi alone, nor was the rooster necessarily Chairman Mao alone. Rather, this could be an account of the changing fortunes of the Eastern Turkistan People's Revolutionary Party in Mao-era China. Regardless of whether this was Seypidin's original intent, I will use this interpretation of the frog's – or rather, the frogs' – ascent as an appropriate allegory to conclude this study.

Abdukërim Abbasof, Muhemmet'imin Iminof, Abdulla Zakirof, Enwer Xanbaba, Seydulla Seypullayof, Es'et Is'haqof, and Seypidin Ezizi banded together in 1945 to make up XIP's original Central Committee. The men worked in secret, using official titles within Exmetjan Qasimi's Eastern Turkistan Republic to mold their homeland into a Soviet-style socialist state. From humble beginnings, their organization quickly expanded its membership, but this was not enough to realize a successful revolution. At the suggestion of the Soviet Union, the young partisans soon sought to foster mutually beneficial ties with the much larger and more successful Chinese Communist Party. *This* was the rooster, and the frog, the People's Revolutionary Party. The frog goads the rooster, singing,

May Allah increase your rank,
And may you one day become king.
Your friend the frog prays for you,
Peace be with you, and a long, long life.⁴²⁹

These words please the rooster. In the context of the Chinese Civil War, this was likely the sentiment that Abdukërim Abbasof conveyed to the Chinese Communists during his meetings with Dong Biwu in Nanjing in late 1946, an overture that would stoke the pride of Mao's beleaguered organization.

In return for their loyalty to the Chinese Communist Party, the leaders of the People's Revolutionary Party asked for dominion over their homeland. "What? Kingship?!" asked the bewildered rooster to the frog. "Considering that I myself am not yet a king, how could *you* be one? After I'm king of the birdworld, we'll give some thought to your becoming king of the frogs." With the Chinese Civil War still far from resolution, the Chinese Communists were not in a position yet to make any definitive promises regarding XIP's role in a future Xinjiang. At the same time, they kept alive the possibility of a XIP "kingship" over Xinjiang that would be equal to that of theirs over China. For the hopeful and naïve partisans of the People's Revolutionary Party, this non-committal answer was as good as a promise, and was enough to ensure their allegiance. Over time, the frog developed a routine of praising the rooster, and ultimately the rooster bestowed the frog with the title of *beg* – but not *king* – of the pondworld. For their steadfast support of the Chinese Communist cause, XIP's leaders were granted names and titles in Xinjiang's post-liberation administration. In the process, they were marginalized by some of their peers. Another day, another Chinese regime lording over their homeland, their detractors charged,

⁴²⁹ See Seypidin Ezizi (1983). Translation courtesy of Gardner Bovingdon, with minor adjustments.

and this time the former leaders of the People's Revolutionary Party were acting as its "puppets."

All the while, however, these Turki leaders pined for more. They were *begs* in Xinjiang, but not kings. Even from the height the frog took as *beg*, the rooster took a higher perch still. They still clung to the hope that Chairman Mao might grant them self-rule, but as the concept of an autonomous region became further developed, they began to realize that they had been mistaken to believe they might ever be given kingship over their homeland. They looked longingly across the border to Soviet Central Asia, where fellow frogs had indeed been named kings, and they grew bitter, both towards the Chinese regime and towards the countrymen who had abandoned them. Some of these Turki leaders aired their grievances to the powers that be, and they paid the price. During the purges of 1950s, they became targets, both as nuisances to the ruling regime and as objects of derision to their fellow Turakis. Muhemmet'imin Iminof, Es'et Is'haqof, and Enwer Xanbaba all quickly ran into political troubles. Seypidin Ezizi held his tongue, keeping alive the dreams of his comrades.

One day early in the morning the rooster *beg* rose and crowed as usual. But he heard not a sound of his song. He crowed again, and again there was nothing. Later he saw the frog *beg*. Emerging from his pond holding the strap of a small drum in his mouth, the frog pulled himself onto the bank of the pond with great difficulty. Seeing the rooster *beg* approach, he let out a wail and sobbed, "They've stripped me of my *begship*. I'm finished, excellency."

Having removed loyal Turki sycophants from power, the Chinese Communist Party found itself devoid of followers in Xinjiang. "Don't worry, my friend," replies the rooster to the frog, "They may have taken your *begship* away, but I haven't. You're still a *beg*. You'll still become king of the reptile world." By 1960, imprisoned XIP comrades were released from

captivity. The promise of kingship thus revived, a chorus of frog praise to the rooster resumed.

At the same time, things were not quite the same. For one thing, kingship had been dangled in front of the frog to console him, but then was not mentioned again. Additionally, the frog was now older and wiser. “[The rooster] has grown tired of my singing and playing the drum. As for [my] *beg*ship, it exists in name, but in fact it’s hollow. And not a whisper about my kingship. The rooster *beg* says that ‘if you ascend to a perch, that’s mounting the king’s throne for you.’” Just like that, the frog decides to take a leap of faith and to seize his kingship. It is unclear precisely when the latter People’s Revolutionary Party was established, or even if it was a continuation of an underground party that was never truly dissolved, but its founding (or rejuvenation) is the historical analog to the frog’s attempt to take the initiative on his own to seize the kingship. A lot of planning went into organizing a vast and capable XIP organization. It had veteran leaders, strength of membership, and clearly stated objectives. What it lacked was sure footing, and its ascent ultimately landed with a thud. Seypidin Ezizi alone managed to hold on, but when Chairman Mao died and China’s political winds changed, he too stumbled, dealing the frog – the People’s Revolutionary Party – its fatal fall from grace.

Seypidin ends his story with a eulogy, which serves as a fitting close to our look at the story of the Eastern Turkistan People’s Revolutionary Party.

Ai, how sad! You left unable to smile, farewell,
You left when your goal was still off by a mile, farewell.
Not knowing your limits, you failed in your trial, farewell,
Departed with no parting shot, ah, farewell.

You hopped to and fro with your sights on the roost,
You sang out your praise to give the rooster a boost,

Tell me, after all that, what indeed was the use?
The bud of success yet unopened, farewell.

You served the rooster *beg*, but you kowtowed in vain,
You fluttered around him like moths to a flame.
You died as a hero; you died just the same,
You left short of earthly “heaven,” farewell.

You glorified the rooster *beg*, and croaked out a *ghezel*,
You praised him full strength, but plopped down in your fall,
You bragged that a crown was the point of it all,
But left without even a golden thread, farewell.

Spurning your home, you left our small lake,
You slithered up into his tree like a snake,
And climbed to the perch, thirst for power to slake,
You departed with your dreams unfinished, farewell.

Did you make *khagan*? Not even as vizier addressed,
I bet you felt regrets like a bullet in your breast.
Only in your grave content, peaceful may you rest
You left without helping your country, farewell.⁴³⁰

The aspirations of the Eastern Turkistan People’s Revolutionary Party thus ended in disappointment and failure. For committed groups of contemporary partisans, however, the struggle for an independent Eastern Turkistan persists, even against ever longer odds. Under Chinese stewardship, Xinjiang today grows increasingly prosperous and interconnected with China’s interior. Long-delayed major infrastructure projects are now a reality, while for most, overall quality of life has steadily improved. Yet as evidenced by continuing problems of unrest and instability throughout the region, economic development alone cannot easily win the hearts of those who cleave to the dream of self-determination. They view the work of their forbearers – of the first and second Eastern Turkistan republics

⁴³⁰ See Seyyidin Ezizi (1983). Translation courtesy of Gardner Bovingdon, with minor adjustments.

and of the Eastern Turkistan People's Revolutionary Party – as unfinished business that will ultimately lead their imagined state of Eastern Turkistan into something more concrete.

Whether or not that goal ever comes to fruition, the forgotten story of the Eastern Turkistan People's Revolutionary Party remains an important part of the histories of Xinjiang, Eastern Turkistan movements, and the Cold War.

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da de gonggu qilai" 坚决地将一切反革命分子镇压下去； 使我们的革命专政大
大地巩固起来 (Resolutely Suppress All Counterrevolutionaries; Further Strengthen
Our Revolutionary Dictatorship), *Xinjiang ribao* 新疆日报 (5 March 1970, evening
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边， 坚决支持夺走资本主义道路当权派的权 (The People's Liberation Army
Stands Steadfastly by Rebel Factions and Resolutely Supports the Seizure of Power

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Education

Indiana University, Ph.D. in Chinese (July 2017)
Ph.D. Minor: Central Eurasian Studies
Advisor: Dr. Gardner Bovington

University of Arizona, M.A. (2006)
Major: Chinese
Advisor: Dr. Fabio Lanza

Wittenberg University, B.A. with Honors (2002)
Major: East Asian Studies
Minors: Religion, Music

Professional Experience

- 2013- Private Tutor (*Chinese*), Potomac, MD
I teach Chinese language, test prep, history, and culture to students from age 8 to 80.
- 2010 Congressional-Executive Commission on China, Washington, DC
During my internship with the CECC, I conducted research and analysis of human rights and rule of law in China.
- 2008 Department of East Asian Languages and Cultures
Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana
As instructor-of-note, I designed, organized, and instructed a general introductory-level East Asian Studies course.
- 2007-2008 Department of East Asian Languages and Cultures
Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana
As graduate assistant, I led discussion, graded assignments, and helped the instructors-of-note with administrative matters in their respective courses.
- 2004-2006 Department of East Asian Studies
University of Arizona, Tucson, Arizona
As graduate assistant, I led discussion, graded assignments, and helped the instructors-of-note with administrative matters in their respective courses.
- 2002-2004 Department of English
Yantai University, Yantai, Shandong, China
As instructor-of-note, I designed, organized, and instructed advanced courses on cinema, journalism, writing, and Anglophone culture.
- 2000-2002 Wittenberg University East Asian Studies Journal
Springfield, Ohio
I was editor-in-chief for America's oldest undergraduate journal of East Asian Studies.

Fellowships and Awards

- 2013 Australia National University
Delegate, Asia-Pacific Week
- 2012 Ministry of Education, Culture and Sciences, Mongolia
Fellowship for Language and Cultural Studies at the Summer School for Young Mongolists
- 2011 U.S. Department of State
Title VIII Grant, Mongolian Language
- 2009 U.S. Department of Education
Foreign Language and Area Studies Fellowship, Mongolian Language
- 2007 U.S. Department of Education
Foreign Language and Area Studies Fellowship, Uyghur Language
- 2006-2007 Indiana University Department of East Asian Languages and Cultures
Graduate Fellowship
- 2002 Phi Beta Kappa

Publications

Dissertation (in progress)

The Eastern Turkistan People's Revolutionary Party: Revolution, Conflict, and National Awakening in China's New Frontier (Indiana University, 2017).

Master's Thesis

The Yang Female and the Rejection of Yin: Women during the Cultural Revolution, 1966-1976 (University of Arizona, 2006).

Chapter

"Mongolian Viewpoints on China's Cultural Revolution." In B. Enkhuvshin, ed. *Gadaadyn zaluu Mongol sudlaach erdemtdiin zuny surguuli* (Summer School for Young Mongolists) (Ulaanbaatar: International Institute for the Study of Nomadic Civilizations, 2012). Pp. 205-215.

Conference Papers

"Mongolian Viewpoints on China's Cultural Revolution," presented at Young Mongolists' Conference, Mongolian State University for Education, Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, July, 2012.

"History and Politics in Chinese Historiography of Cultural Revolution-era Xinjiang," presented at University of Toronto East Asian Studies Conference, March, 2009.

"A Tale of Two Parties: Cultural Revolution and Enemy Creation in China's Borderlands," presented at Columbia University East Asian Studies Conference, January, 2009.

"Discovering Uyghur History in Xinjiang," presented at Association of Central Eurasian Students Conference, Indiana University, January, 2008.

"Uyghur Ethnic and Maoist Activism: Xinjiang during the Cultural Revolution Era, 1966-1976," presented at Columbia University East Asian Studies Conference, January 2006.

Service

- 2014- Church Council Member, Parish Life Director, *Christ the Servant Lutheran Church*, Montgomery Village, Maryland.
- 2011-2012 Assistant Instructor, *Bridges Goyo-Goyo Mongolian Language Instruction Program*, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana.
- 2007-2009 Chinese Language Assistant, *Hanover College*, Hanover, Indiana.
- 2000-2002 Vice President, Philanthropy Chair, *Lambda Chi Alpha Fraternity Nu Zeta Chapter*, Wittenberg University, Springfield, Ohio.

Foreign Languages

Chinese, Uyghur, Mongolian (writing, speaking, reading); Russian, Persian, French (reading)